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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

CHILDREN'S SELF-ORGANIZED OUTDOOR PLAY

BY

SHERRY LYNN WOITTE ©

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND

RESEARCH IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR

THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF EDUCATION

IN

INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATIONS

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SUBMITTED BY **Sherry Lynn Woitte**

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF EDUCATION IN INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION.

Supervisor - A. D. Fisher, Ph.D.

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Date: Aug. 16/93

Abstract

The subject of children's play has been a popular topic in many fields of research, and has been particularly well-researched in the area of education and psychology. However, much of this research has focused on the play of individual children and evaluation of their play, as observed in the laboratory or classroom setting. The majority of this research has also concentrated on the play of Western middle-class children, and often used this analysis to evaluate non-Western children's play.

This study has attempted to look at one of the areas of children's play which has not been well-studied, that is self-organized outdoor play. In this study, I used participant observation to gather data on how children play in the community playground, Sunshine Park and Playground, which is located near the inner-city of a major western Canadian city. The data was analyzed in order to determine what types or styles of play the children most often displayed in their self-directed play.

My research results showed that the playground play of the children of Sunshine Park and Playground was particular and unique with regard to the age and gender within play groups, the type of play observed, and the nature of the play recorded. These findings parallel other research which has been done regarding the play of both Western and non-Western children.

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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Illustration

Going to the community playground on an autumn day often one can see a variety of activities occurring. In one area of the playground, you might see a group of children playing with their Dinky toys, perhaps digging and building roads in the sand, or perhaps shooting the toys down or *up* the slide. In another corner you might see a group of children, some as young as twelve months of age, playing on the tire swings. In another spot, around the large swing apparatus, you might see a group of children playing a game of tag. The children play contentedly in the playground, and there are rarely any parents present to monitor their activities nor to oversee their care. *This* is the setting where my observations of children's play have been carried out and this illustration describes just a few of the activities which I have seen during my visits.

Explaining the Study

Defining the Problem

Initial interest in children's play was sparked a number of years ago, when I studied play as a teaching strategy; a method designed for use in the elementary school classroom. I discovered that much of the research was centered on the psychological evaluation of children's play, especially work done by Piaget and Parten. These theorists based their evaluation on work done with Western, middle-class children, and the theories arising from this work categorized play into a hierarchical system, with 'solitary' play at the bottom and 'pretend' play at the top.

In addition, to the developmental analysis of children's play and the categorization of this play, many of the theories were then used to classify different children's play. These projects were usually carried out in laboratory situations because of the ability to apply scientific controls to the studies. Besides laboratories, some research projects were done in nursery and play schools.

Once the categories were firmly established, many different groups of children were evaluated using the play hierarchy. It was generally found that children from non-Western[1] cultures and those from lower socio-economic strata played in predominantly different modes and for different amounts of time than children from Western culture and from upper- to middle-classes. In this way it was determined that not only did these non-Western and lower SES children play differently, but they were classified as being *deficient* in play. These children were found playing more often in the lower levels of play and played little at the higher level of pretend/ dramatic play. It was believed that there was a direct

---

[1]Throughout this thesis I use the terms Western and non-Western to describe and delineate the cultural and geographic origin of the children. This is really an arbitrary identification is not in any way a pejorative.

transfer of skills from dramatic play, especially socio-dramatic, which would assist the children in classroom interactions and classroom learning. The next logical step for these researchers of developmental play categorization was to develop play-tutoring to help the children who they felt were deficient in play.

With an interest in anthropology, I felt that perhaps this discipline could offer additional information on this subject of play, especially with regard to children from other cultures and socio-economic classes who were felt to be play deficient. In order to determine what anthropology could provide, I scrutinized material which examined play from a cultural approach. The material which I found, could be divided into two main areas. First, was the study of children's play in non-Western settings which viewed children's play as part of the socialization and children-rearing activities. The second area of anthropological research on children's play concentrated on the play of Western children in school or school-like[2] settings. If these school studies did include non-Western children, it was almost exclusively in a comparative context with Western children. After viewing both the developmental psychology's categorization of play studies and the anthropological play studies, I could see that an obvious void in the literature had appeared. This gap in the research seemed to point to the need to study children's play holistically in non-laboratory/ school settings.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study, then, was to attempt to help fill this void by studying children's play, through the observation of self-organized play behaviors in an outdoor setting. In order to view children's play which was as natural as possible and in order to gain information on this type of play, and

[2]School-like settings refers to other institutions which care for and educate young children, such as play schools, day cares, and nursery schools.

because so little research had been done in this location, the outdoor setting was chosen. In order to avoid researcher control or interference of the play activities, self-directed children's play was selected. This type of play has rarely been examined and documentation points to a need for information on how children play when they organize their own activities.

The specific playground, Sunshine Park and Playground, was selected because of its location. Sunshine Park and Playground was close to the inner-city, and had a user/clientele which was culturally mixed. Once again the research indicated that very little holistic or qualitative investigation had been done on culturally diverse groups of children.

Ethnography, specifically, participant observation was chosen as the research method. This methodology was selected for three reasons. Firstly, because play encompasses so much of the child's life (play is the child's life), a methodology needed to be used which enabled the researcher to gather data in a holistic manner. Secondly, as a reaction to so much of the research on children's play which has used the clinical/ scientific method of observing children play, I felt that a different methodology was necessary if I wanted to get a new picture of children's play. And lastly, as a parent-researcher (my son, Kristopher -- D.O.B. October 04, 1988), I could easily gain access to a playground situation without drawing attention to myself or disrupting the children's play. In addition, I felt it would be possible to use my son as my 'key-informant', wherein he could help clarify play situations for me.

Gathering the Data

As mentioned, this study was designed to examine the self-organized outdoor play of children. Observational ethnographic data was obtained through anecdotal records and field notes which recorded the play of the children at

Sunshine Park and Playground. Photographs were used and maps were made to supplement my field notes.

Analysis of the Data

The analysis consisted of the transcription of my field notes of the activities which took place during my visits to Sunshine Park and Playground. Transcription of the field notes was carried out as soon as possible following my visit to the playground. The data was then examined in order to determine any significant play events and/or consistencies in the play activities which I had observed during my visits to Sunshine Park and Playground.

Significance of the Study

The significance of the study can be understood in several ways. Initially, the lack of material dealing with this topic is obvious, and for this reason needed to be addressed. In addition, because play is used as both a teaching strategy and an evaluative tool in our school systems, a more holistic evaluation of play in a non-traditional setting was necessary in order to gain a clearer picture of how *all* children play.

Ethics of the Study

As a participant observer and researcher I was concerned and had to be aware of protecting the anonymity of the children whom I was observing at Sunshine Park and Playground. In order to do this, the children's names, the name of the park and playground, and the location of the park and playground were all changed in order to protect their anonymity and confidentiality. In addition, because I did not have permission to interview the children, direct involvement

was limited to visual observation, and interaction only if the children approached me.

Organization of the Chapters

In this first chapter, a definition of the problem, the purpose and the significance of the study, and a brief outline of the design of the study were presented. In Chapter Two, the theories behind play, observation, and ethnography were examined, and their relevance to this study was evaluated. Chapter Three reviewed the related literature and research. Chapter Four presented the analysis and discussion of the research data. A general discussion, conclusion, and implications for educational practice are presented in Chapter Five.

Chapter Two

CHILDREN'S PLAY, OBSERVATION, AND ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH: THE THEORIES

Introduction

This chapter will concentrate on the theory behind the study of play and the observation of it, and the use of ethnography as a research method for the study of play. In order to supply some background on the study of play, initially I will discuss definitions of play, as proposed by a number of authors. In the second section of this chapter, I will examine game-playing, especially the playful aspects of this activity, and also discuss game-playing in relation to children's self-organized play. The third part of this chapter will focus on the importance of play and purposes in studying play. In this section, I will discuss the inter-relatedness of play and culture, what Margaret Mead has called the "cultural style of play" (1975, p. 169). I will also use ethological studies of primate play to exemplify why it is important to study play. The fourth section of this chapter will concentrate on the observation of play and what this observation of play tells us. The fifth part will include a discussion of how anthropology, and specifically ethnography and participant observation, can contribute to the observation of children's play. The final section of this chapter focuses on the playground setting, in which I have chosen to carry out my observations, and the limitations of this setting and research methodology.

Defining Play?

Defining play[3] has been a difficult and illusive task for those who study it; as Adelman so aptly puts it, "there is no single agreed-upon definition of play and, even if there were, we would disagree on observational criteria"(1990, p. 197). But many definitions have their merit, and I will, at this point, discuss a few.

Early in its study, play was often defined by the purposes which it was thought to serve. Denzin (1975) summarizes these by saying that people use play to confront or avoid problems, and to produce or lose energy. The production or loss of energy, was the purpose usually used to describe children's play. Also early in its study, play was defined by the attributes (characteristics) which it was seen to have. Play is seen as an "end to itself, it is spontaneous, it is an activity pursued for pleasure, it has a relative lack of organization, it is characterized by an absence of conflict, and it produces no economic gain or loss for its players" (Denzin, 1975, p. 459). These purposes have since been expanded upon, to produce much more encompassing definitions and descriptions.

One of the first to study play in a holistic manner was J. Huizinga (1950). His definition of play is extensive and *partially* summarized as: voluntary, free, freedom; essentially unserious in its goals although often seriously executed; a temporary activity satisfying in itself, an intermezzo or interlude, but an integral part of life and a necessity; distinct in locality and duration; repetitive; creates order and is order -- has rules, rhythm, and harmony; has elements of tension, uncertainty, chanciness; and older than civilization or culture, it sub-serves culture and becomes culture (Norbeck, 1977). Rather than seeing play as a small part of other activities, Huizinga saw play as being involved in most parts of

---

[3]Harkness & Super make a clear argument over this dilemma. "Yet the confusion -- if such it is -- over what the real definition of play is may indicate (among other things) an important aspect of this construct: namely, that play may be a very different kind of phenomenon depending on the context in which it takes place" (1983, p. 98). In fact, comparing play may very well be like comparing apples and oranges.

everyday life -- in other words, "civilization arises and unfolds in and as play" (Norbeck, 1977, p. 17).

Play is also observed outside of human interaction, and therefore has been explained in ethological or primatological terms. In her research comparing primate and human play, Dobbert explains that play may be said to exist when "an individual's specific orientation or focus of attention is developed through activity characterized by repetition and usually exaggeration which is accompanied in many cases by fragmentation, sequence shifting, and often, especially in social contexts, the presence of a play face" (1985, p. 158). This description, also, quite obviously applies to human, and especially to children's play.

Play as defined in the above interpretations, has focused on general, cultural, and ethological definitions. Psychologists have also studied play closely, and have thoroughly defined and described it. Bruner (1983) gives it five characteristics, wherein play: implies a reduction in seriousness and is an excellent medium for exploration; is characterized by a very loose linkage between means and ends; is very random or by chance; is a projection of interior life; and gives pleasure -- great pleasure.

Linked closely to the psychological definition of play, is that description often given by educators[4]. Bernstein (1977) maintains that play is part of the invisible pedagogy of lower elementary school. He defines play as:

> 1) the means by which the child exteriorises himself to the teacher. . . . ;
>
> 2) play does not merely describe an activity, it also contains an evaluation of that activity . . . . Play implies a potentially all-embracing theory, for it covers nearly all if not all the child's doing and not doing. . . . The theory

[4]It should be noted that because of the strong connection between education and psychology, their definitions do not differ very much. However, education does place play within the context of the classroom or school, and is most often connected to learning.

> gives rise to a total -- but invisible -- surveillance of the child, because it relates his inner dispositions to all his external acts; 3) both the means and ends of play are multiple and change with time; 4) the social basis of this theory of play is not an individual act, but a personalised act; not strongly framed, but weakly framed encounters; and 5) in essence, play is work and work is play. (pp. 512-13)

And Michelet (1986) believes that it is through play that children do, indeed, learn in school.

> It is essentially through play that, hitherto unbeknown to the teacher, the child, the adolescent and even the adult master, assimilate what the teacher brings to them, making it a real part of their lives, going beyond conventional, reflex, rote learning and incorporating it in their inner experience, so that it becomes directly relevant to their thinking and their acts. (p. 118)

In this way educators also see play in much the same way as do the primatologists, as part and parcel of the learning process of the young.

The final[5] definition of play which I will reflect upon is that which differentiates children's play from games. Denzin considers the differentiation as having four arenas: the first form of play is sensory-motor as observed by Piaget. The second form of play "will be playing-at-play, and playing-at-games. The final form will be playing games. Yet at any point after the age of three, if the child has had sufficient interactional experience, her or she can engage in any of these

---

[5]In addition to the differentiation of play from games, Schwartzman puts forth some interesting play metaphors. Though not a *pure* definition, Schwartzman, uses four metaphors to describe make-believe play. The Upward View looks at "play as imitation of, and hence preparation for, adult activities" (1976, p. 200). The Inward/Outward View looks at "play as projection" (1976, p. 200). The Backward View is "generally used to interpret children's games" (1976, p. 201). And Sideways View looks at *play as text*. But states that one must first learn something about the *social context* of the children. We also need to know the play styles and the history of these players' relationships with one another. In this view, play "can be viewed as communication"(1976, p. 201).

three play forms" (1975, p. 473). Denzin expands on this by explaining that play is both an "expansive and expandable interactional form. It is not tied to the demand of time and place. Unlike games which have concrete rules specifying who may play and how many players who can play is limited by the number of persons present and by the relationships the players have with one another. Often these relationships stand outside the moment of play itself" (1975, p. 466). Denzin furthers this definition by actually giving two meanings to play.

> On the one hand, it will describe the activities that occur during the gaming encounter. Persons as players play games; they are playing at a game. *However some persons play at games, but are not playing a game.* . . . When persons engage in the production of a pretense awareness context that is not framed by the specific rules of a game, they shall be said to be 'playing-at-playing' . . . (which) involves the use of flexible rules and it is much less tied to any specific place. (1975, p. 465)

In fact, Denzin believes that the "longer a play form is played, the more game-like it becomes. The child player, then, is seen as moving along a continuum of play complexity; yet this continuum must be viewed in multi-dimensional terms" (1975, p. 473)[6].

What finally must be kept in mind when trying to delineate a definition of play, are the very real difficulties in finding that definition. These difficulties in obtaining a definition can be related to very different types of play which are exhibited. There

> is no reason to expect that all of the different behaviors described as play necessarily have the same function in an infant's development, nor are they necessarily controlled by the same causal factors. What has to be done,

---

[6]Although this differentiation is not imperative in the definition of children's play, it is imperative to the discussion of my own observations of self-organized play (Chapter 4). In addition, I do believe that games <u>are</u> a part of play.

> therefore, is to investigate each of these different aspects of play separately and to find out what controls them and what function they perform in the infant's development. Only when this has been done will it be possible to discover whether the different aspects of play have much or anything in common. (Chalmers, 1979, pp. 122-23)

Although Chalmers refers specifically to infants in this case, much of what he says can be applied to all children's play. And even though it is important to consider the individual facets of children's play it must, most importantly, be viewed in a holistic manner.

As has been said, the definitions and descriptions of play are wide and varied. However, the definition which will be focused upon, in this thesis, is that which includes play as a part of life and culture.

Playful Gaming

Although games and gaming have often been separated from the study of play, I believe and most theories agree that games (except some of those organized by adults) are part of play and playful activities. In addition, since carrying out my observations at Sunshine Park and Playground, I have found that games are also a large part of children's self-organized play. In order to provide a background for the analysis of those games, I will look at the theories behind the study of games and gaming. In addition, I will conduct a brief overview of some of the methods of analyzing games, and in particular, techniques for examining children's self-organized games.

Gaming Theory

Game play or the analysis of game-playing is a well-studied area with respect to competitive sports. However, the study of gaming, as organized by children themselves[7], is rare. Despite this, there has been some work done and theory proposed in this area. For example, Opie & Opie describe "a true game (as) one that frees the spirit" (1969, p. 1), like any play. Opie & Opie also note some of the predominant characteristics of children's self-organized gaming, and say

> that when children play a game in the street they are often extraordinarily naïve or, according to viewpoint, highly civilized. They seldom need an umpire, they rarely trouble to keep scores, little significance is attached to who wins or loses, they do not require the stimulus of prizes, it does not seem to worry them if a game is not finished. Indeed children like games in which there is a sizable element of luck, so that individual abilities cannot be directly compared. They like games which restart almost automatically, so that everybody is given a new chance. They like games which move in stages, in which each stage, the choosing of leaders, the picking-up sides, the determining of which side shall start, are almost games in themselves. (1969, p. 2)

If left on their own, children are also very adept at creating just the game they want to play; one "which is under his control, and yet . . . one of which he does not know the outcome" (Opie & Opie, 1969, p. 3). In addition to the organization of the games themselves, children also have very different interpretations of these games.

> In fact, children's games often seem laborious to adults who, if invited to join in, may find themselves becoming impatient, and wanting to speed

---

[7]This void really differs little from the lack of study of any self-organized play which children initiate.

> them up. Adults do not see, when subjected to lengthy preliminaries, that many of the games, particularly those of young children, are more akin to ceremonies than competitions. In these games children gain the reassurance that comes with repetition, and the feeling of fellowship that comes from doing the same as everyone else. (Opie & Opie, 1969, p. 2)

Hughes concurred with Opie & Opie, as she found that 'playing the game' may include much "action that is in no way defined by the activity itself, even though that action may be strongly shaped by its occurrence within one type of episode rather than another. There are many possible breaks in or overlays upon the action specified by the game" (1991, p. 291). Hughes (1991) cites examples of these interruptions: time-outs, fights, discussions, interruptions, interferences, stalemates, sideplays, side involvements, and changes in keying or footing. This differs a great deal from those adult-organized games where the game, itself, is *the game*. Playing 'a game' to the children who organize it, is as much the game as everything else involved with it.

Despite the control that children have over their *own* games (if self-directed), this is not to say that the games remain constant. In fact, children's games go through significant changes over time.

> If children played their games invariably in the way the previous generation played them, the study of youthful recreation could be a matter merely of antiquarian scholarship. But they do not. Despite the motherly influence of tradition, of which we have seen examples, children's play is like every other social activity, it is subject to continual change. The fact that the games are played slightly differently in different places, and may even vary in name, is itself evidence that mutation takes place. (Opie & Opie, 1969, p. 8).

But Opie & Opie note a peculiar and unique aspect to this change in children's games. Those games which appear to be declining most rapidly are those which are best known by adults, and also most often promoted by them; "while the games and amusements that flourish are those that adults find most difficulty in encouraging (e.g.. knife-throwing games and chases in the dark), or are those sports, such as ball-bouncing and long-rope skipping, in which adults are ordinarily least able to show proficiency" (1969, p. 10). It seems that once the children realize that the games are no longer under their *control*, they are not interested in them simply because they cannot control them.

And yet, Opie & Opie note that

> the belief that traditional games are dying out is itself traditional; it was received opinion even when those who now regret the passing of the games were themselves vigorously playing them. We overlook the fact as we have grown older our interests have changed, we have given up haunting the places where children play we no longer have eyes for the games, and not noticing them supposed them to have vanished. We forget that children's amusements are not always ones that attract attention. (1969, 14)

For a researcher, this belief in the 'dying out of games' is particularly important, and one that we must be very cautious of, because if we accept this belief then we are apt to miss or overlook the games which are still present.

Analysis of Gaming

Because gaming has had much attention paid to it through physical education and competitive sports study, thorough frameworks have been developed for the analysis of games. However, these are not always useful for the analysis of children's self-organized games. Avedon (1971), Goldstein (1971),

Denzin (1975), and Hughes (1991) have, however, developed a number of frameworks for analyzing games which are very valuable in the analysis of children's self-directed games.

Avedon (1971), in his analysis of the structural elements of games, delineated seven components in games, which had been derived from work by mathematicians and behaviorists. They included: purpose or raison d'être; procedures for action; rules governing action; number of required players; roles of participant; participant interaction patterns; and results of pay-off (1971, p. 422). Avedon, himself, added three others which consisted of: abilities and skills required for participation; environmental requirements and necessary physical setting; and required equipment needed for participation in game (1971, p. 422).

In spite of the elements being relatively thoroughly described by Avedon, other researchers have found that many of these are not absolute. Goldstein (1971) in his study of counting out games, found that rather than 'counting out' being a game of chance, in which the rules were strict and well-defined, it was a game of strategy "in which the rhymes and movements of the players are manipulated to limit or remove chance as a factor in selection" (Goldstein, 1971, p. 172). Goldstein further defined these differences by stating that "more than for any other folklore genre, rules are an essential part of games at an overt and sometimes verbalized level, (but these are the) rules by which people *should* play rather than the ones by which they *do* play" (1971, p. 172). And in fact, "for games we may have to know *two* sets of rules: these ideal ones *and* those by which the ideal rules are applied, misapplied, or subverted" (Goldstein, 1971, p. 172).

In addition, to the rules being altered, or at least having more than one meaning, the setting was also not a fixed station. Denzin states that "the place or places of the games are differentially fixed. . . . However, once the place of the

game has been set it is typically seen as 'playable' only in the place, at least for its current duration" (1975, p. 464). He also notes that "skill and chance are the essential elements that are played over" (1975, p. 463) in games, and that games are "focused around rules which determine the role that skill and chance will have" (1975, p. 463).

Inasmuch as these elements of games have been helpful in examining gaming, they are notably problematic (as indicated above), so new methodologies have been developed. Denzin notes that

> students of play and games have tended to divorce these interactional forms from the interpersonal contexts that produce them. Thus the majority of existing formulations are context-free typologies, divorcing play and games from social setting. Furthermore, they seldom take account of the player's perspective in the playing or gaming episode, young child or otherwise. (1975, p. 461)

Hughes in her work took note of this problem and approached "games not as a set of abstract rules but as highly situated social contexts in which players collectively construct a complex and richly textured communal experience" (1991, p. 286). As a result, Hughes (1991) observes that the basic unit of analysis in gaming studies should be the play episode, not the game[8].

Additionally, Hughes asserts that folkgames (those which are played and passed on *by* children) are "something more than a listing of their rules. They are richly textured and highly situated instances of social life. Playing games is of a very different order than describing them [Collet, 1977], and it always requires that players know something more than the rules of the game" (1991, p. 287).

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[8]This is exemplified in Hewes' (A.T.A. News, 1989) discussion, "the game of hide-and-seek, for example, is about much more than finding a hiding place and waiting to be found. Everybody has an individual memory of what's involved -- phrases uttered, the method of counting before setting out on the 'hunt', the special hiding place. The overriding message of the game is that in order to be secure, everybody needs to be found" (p. 4).

With this in mind, Hughes states that the primary goal of gaming studies was to describe how the social worlds of players were integrated with the stated demands of particular games in order to generate qualitatively different versions of the same activity. She believed that such research should, therefore, be concerned with three areas of meaning: the rules of the game (the game text), the rules of the social world in which that game is being played (the social context), and the "additional domain of shared understandings generated out of the interaction between game structure and social structure in particular times and place (gaming rules)" (1991, p. 287).

Hughes goes on to describe gaming rules, what she calls 'rules for rules'. She believes that they

> . . . consist, among other things, of shared understandings about (a) when and how the rules of the game ought to be applied, ignored, or modified; (b) which of many possible interpretations is most appropriately applied to specific instances of the same or very similar actions; (c) which of many possible courses of action is to be preferred over others in particular circumstances; and (d) what the limits and consequences of acceptable conduct in the game are. (1991, p. 287)

In fact, these gaming rules, "like other rules of the social world, have a critical evaluative dimensions and this is reflected in phrases like *ought to be, preferred,* and *acceptable* "(Hughes, 1991, p. 287).

Although, according to Hughes, games have more flexible rules than what were once depicted, games do still *have* rules.

> Games usually have some clearly stated objective, or point, almost always stated in terms of criteria for determining winners and losers. Participants in the game, however, have purposes [Sabini & Silver, 1982], and these may be shaped not only by the game, but also by social matrix in which it

> is embedded. . . . They may define success very differently than the game defined winning [Simon, 1985], and they may further reinterpret winning in light of various agendas that are extrinsic to the game itself. (Hughes, 1991, p. 290)

In other words, for the children, it is the *playing* of the game, not the game itself, which is important.

One can then say that the study of children's self-organized games has often only been done superficially. However, the subject of gaming has been more thoroughly examined, and as a result the elements of gaming have been well-defined. Although these elements have been helpful in the evaluation of children's games, both Denzin (1975) and Hughes (1991) point out some obvious deficiencies with these types of constructs. Probably the most important of these is the lack of consideration of the social world of these children in the analyses of their games and game-playing.

Why Is Play Important?

> **Man[9] plays only when he is in the fullest sense of the word a human being, and he is fully a human being only when he plays.** (Schiller, 1967, 107, in Norbeck, 1977, p. 18)

As mentioned, or at least alluded to, play, in many disciplines, has been dissected and examined so intensively that it often no longer resembles play. In this examination, I will look at play in a holistic manner. Play is part of life, and, therefore, a part of culture. And to quote Swick, "children learn about culture by being a part of that culture and not simply by following the verbal directives of adults (1987, p. 8).

In her studies of Afro-American child-rearing practices, Hale exemplifies this connection between play and culture.

> The study of child-rearing practices by Black families is crucial to identifying the manner in which Afro-American culture shapes the behavior of Black children. It is equally significant that through play, the culture is expressed or celebrated. The study of child-rearing is an examination of what 'goes in'. *The study of play behaviors is the study of what 'comes out'* (emphasis added). (Hale, 1982, p. 89)

This connection between play and culture has long been recognized in the field of anthropology, but *not* extensively studied. Because anthropology looks at human culture holistically, play is not usually extracted in the study, but instead is looked at as part of the socialization of the child. "Periodically, as methodologies of the study of human behavior shift, interest may be *focused* (emphasis added) on children's play as a suitable subject for the exploration of regularities in child development, for the study of individual pathologies, or for the study of creativity in childhood" (Mead, 175, p. 157). But in anthropological

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[9] And this is <u>not</u> meant to exclude girls and women.

studies, children's play has not been a particular focus -- it has, as Mead indicates, traditionally been dealt with in psychology.

As part of culture, play is formed by that culture. But as part of the learning process, play also helps to form culture and give culture continuity from one generation to the next. In fact, "play is structured in order to instruct our children, however subtly, in the values of our culture" (Bruner, 1983, p. 62). Frost and Sunderlin in When Children Play, reinforce this reciprocity of play and culture by saying that, "play is universal, knowing no national or cultural boundaries, peculiar to all ages and all races, subject to description yet defying definition; essential to the development of thought and language, yet neither[10]; (and is) central to the transmission of culture, yet transcending culture" (Guddemi, 1987, p. 2). Norbeck (1977) also states that play is a striking and universal behavior which is genetically based and culturally modified.

Using anthropology as a base, those that study play have frequently used primatology to assist in getting to the root of play behaviors. Although it can be seen from the above comments that play assists in the transmission of culture, it is in primatology, that perhaps the role of play can be seen. "Play is revealed as one of two central mechanisms in primate learning: contextualized experience and play (social or individual)" (Dobbert, 1985, p. 162). In fact, Dobbert (1985) goes on to say that both are critical for *full growth*. Play can also be seen to be necessary for its adaptive value. Play is extremely important in preparing the child for adult life. "Through infantile and juvenile play, members of a species become familiar with their natural environment, gain experience in socializing with other members of their species, and acquire motor and other skills needed in adult life for survival" (Norbeck, 1979, p. 33). In young primates, learning is often synonymous with play. "Primate dispositions to learn, orient individuals to

[10]This particular point has been strongly argued against by Schwartzman (1976) and Hewes (1981), who both say that play *is* a language unto itself.

explore, examine, and test facets of their environment with no necessary instrumental goal. Curiosity itself is sufficient motive, (and) learning (is) sufficient reward. Play in this sense lies at the heart of all invention" (Hansen, 1979, p. 11). Creativity is often *expressed* in play.

In spite of the similarities, the role of play *is* slightly different in Homo sapiens, than in other primate species. In Homo sapiens, "play takes a more definitive role and it becomes essential for full normal development because of the reliance humans place on socially derived cultural structures in their adaptations" (Dobbert, 1985, p. 162). For non-human primates, play is not essential for the development of relatively normal behavior, but *is* necessary for optimal development (Dobbert, 1985). The main difference between human and other primate play is, obviously, language[11]. This linguistic difference is, again, linked to the acquisition of a complex human culture.

Play allows for *great* learning, and appears to serve a critical function "as perhaps the major channel through which juveniles acquire information about their physical environment, familiarize themselves with the social structure and conventions of their group[12], and test and improve their motor skills" (Herzog, 1984, p. 72). In essence, play allows juveniles to learn their culture. Play really provides all the necessary elements for the best learning -- "a slightly aroused but open emotional state, repetition, contact and manipulation, and the free combination of the physical, cognitive, and behavioral elements of adult life" (Dobbert & Cooke, 1987, p. 108). In other words, this allows the children to gain

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[11]As Dobbert (1985) points out the percentage of play varies among primates. Humans match other play rates, but do not reach the highs, as human children spend a great deal of time in communication activities involving language.

[12]Dobbert & Cooke (1987) note that primate play is most often characterized by *peer play*, and that "peer play is the appropriate method of learning, and perhaps the only efficient major method of learning for them at this stage of mental development" (p. 104). This type of play also assists in the transition away from the juveniles' mothers.

more experience through which they are better able to solve complex problems in later life.

Besides general learning, play has many specific benefits: 1) it provides a means of practicing important behavior patterns; 2) it is useful in gathering information from the environment; 3) it can prevent certain muscles from atrophying through disuse; 4) it provides time to generate potentially useful new behaviors; and 5) it may aid in the formation of social bonds and help to integrate an animal into its social group (Dolgin, 1979). Thus, primate play provides a holistic means of learning (in many forms) and for all areas of development. This contradicts much of the learning which human children partake in, as discussed by Pitman, Eisikovits, & Dobbert, who state that

> for humans, as for other primates, instructive and formative activity constitutes a very minute part of the learning process. Instead, the major forces 'shaping' children and young people in the process of culture acquisition are the same as those that shape or direct all learners, namely, the structures and processes of the entire sociocultural life going on around them. In addition, the process of culture acquisition by which children and young people learn to be fully functioning adults is a holistic one. (1989, p. 3)

This holistic aspect of play allows for the integration of learning. In Homo sapiens "the integrating aspects of play are particularly important because humans are polyphasic learners, that is, they learn through all sensory modalities simultaneously" (Dobbert, 1985, p. 161). This integrated learning through play, creates the understanding of specific skills which then can be tied to the culture as a whole.

The above examples and discussion illustrate, the importance of play as both a 'vehicle' for learning and as a transmitter of culture.

Why Study Play/Why Observe Play?

As discussed in the previous section, play is one of the most important means for a child to connect her/his cultural to her/himself, and in turn to adequately learn that culture. Therefore, studying children's play gives us an inside look at the culture of that child, and perhaps a look at the 'culture of childhood', too. "Suffice it to say that one implied goal in studying children's play can be the defining of culture, that is, the definition of the culture comes out of the study, as part of our understanding of the play itself" (Slaughter & Dombrowski, 1989, p. 282). Play can, as well, be seen as the 'mediating link' for the child -- "we have contended that the child's family is the essential mediating link between the transmission of culture and emergent patterns of play" (Slaughter & Dombrowski, 1989, p. 304). In this sense, play teaches and assists in the socialization process for each child.

Socialization, as such, occurs both within and outside of a society. However, within a culture, socialization is the "goal-oriented and conscious activity intended to produce competent adults as the latter are defined by a given society or social group" (Ogbu, 1979, p. 4). Play acts to encourage the 'proper' socialization of the children in their particular culture -- "play integrates social skills with physical survival skills making these latter socially useful" (Dobbert, 1985, p. 160). And the control of this play, and the socialization resulting from it, are by *no* means left to occur accidentally. Dobbert also says that "play is not left to chance or whim. Adults promote and sponsor play among the young by watching play to see that it does not get out of hand, by providing a benign, protected environment, and by playing with youngsters themselves" (1985, p. 160). This control of the play by the adults of the society, whether conscious or unconscious (and in most cases it is unconscious), still occurs. "What we call children's play is in a great part the consciously patterned ways in which children

relate to, and experiment with, their social and physical environment and their own abilities" (Leacock, 1976, p. 466).

This control of children's play can be exemplified in a couple of ways. Firstly, how competitive a group of children are, is an indication of the role of competition versus cooperation within that society. Bruner believes that the

> way the competitive element is handled in childhood play is a big factor in predisposing children in particular societies to take the competitive stance that they do as adults. There is no question that the games of childhood reflect some of the ideals that exist in the adult society and that play is a kind of socialization in preparation for taking your place in that adult society. (1983, p. 62)

This competitive/cooperative element also works with 'conflict' as essential elements of play, and how the socialization can occur. A "balance of cooperation and social conflict and competition are necessary components of play for young primates and lead to learning the social structure and their position within it" (Dobbert, 1985, p. 160). Secondly, in this discussion of the control of children's play by the adults within that culture, is the length of time in which children have to learn their culture through play. The juvenile period in humans is unusually long due to the complex culture which human children must be socialized into. "During these years of maturation, juveniles spend their time in the literally 'serious business' of play. . . . (The) prolongation of the juvenile period creates those conditions in which learning from peers and near-peers becomes a major vehicle of socialization" (Herzog, 1984, p. 73). Norbeck expands on this by discussing the extraordinarily large part of our life which is available for children to play

> and, through such play, for (the) absorption of the culture necessary or useful for adult life. . . . The adaptive value of human play must

> accordingly lie in, or include, other matters: 1) human play is highly distinctive in its dependence upon symbolizing, the unique human ability to attach meaning arbitrarily to things, and events, as, for example, in language; and 2) (the) range of behavior which humans are capable of. (1979, p. 36)

This study of children's play as an agent of socialization "relates to (the) knowledge necessary for successful functioning as an adult in a particular culture, especially . . . (through the use of) detailed studies (which) hold promise for enhancing our understanding of . . . 'the acquisition of culture'" (Harkness & Super, 1983, p. 97), and a number of studies *do* confirm the theory that play is a serious socializer. For example, Miracle looked at the strong socializing capacities of play in the Aymara of Bolivia. "Games and play are vehicles for socialization. Aymara youngsters learn agricultural skills, basic marketing practices, animal husbandry, and boat-building skills from various play activities" (Miracle, 1976, p. 103), and the activities which the Aymara learn are all necessary to become functioning adults in the Aymara society.

> Play, then, is a socially legitimate activity that is seen as appropriate for its player and, as long as it does not splash over into the worlds of the unappreciative audience, the child will be encouraged to play, and play, and play. Unwittingly this carefree activity called play constitutes the most important interactional experiences of the young child. For in play he or she becomes a more sophisticated member of the outside social world where work is taken seriously and play is regarded as inconsequential. (Denzin, 1975, p. 474)

The Aymaran, as well as many other cultures, have some very strong feelings about children's play, and do their best to control this play. The Aymara believe that one should play only after finishing all work.

> Better still, one should do something useful while playing, such as carrying feed or caring for animals. . . . Children are free to play at home in the house. It is felt to be bad for parents to allow their children to play because this will result in the children growing up to become rebellious, and to be lazy. Children can play in front of their parent(s) only if there is no work for the children to do. . . . The parental sanction against playing is strong. (Miracle, 1976, p. 99)

In fact, different societies sanction play in different ways. In our Western society, we sanction our children's play by limiting it to particular areas both inside and outside our homes. Street play has, for instance, been strongly discouraged both for safety reasons and because it interferes with the business activities which take place there. In examining the play of the African children of Kokwet, Harkness & Super noted that, "it seems that parents in different cultures choose different domains for developing desired characteristics in their children. . . . In Kokwet, children's play very often takes place in the context of work[13]" (1983, pp. 102-3). In Beatrice Whiting's work (in Harkness & Super, 1983) in several different cultures, "children's play was found to often occur as interspersed with other activities or curtailed in some fashion" (p. 100).

In addition, to the combined activities of work and play, the play in most cultures often takes on an imitative role which further assists socialization (and education). Leacock notes that "imitative play was basic in the training of African children" (1976, p. 467). Both, Child (1983) on her work with Asian-English children's play, and Bennet, Baker, and Nelson (1988) on their study of Yup'ik girls 'storyknifing', say that the play is usually part of everyday life. And, in fact, Bennet et al. feel that the 'storyknifing' (play) provides Yup'ik women and

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[13]And Harkness & Super comment further on our own culture and its understanding of children's play. "To say that the opposite is true of our American culture, though over simple, may not be far from the truth" (1983, p. 103).

girls "a means . . . to interpret the tremendous influences of western culture within their world" (1988, p. 1). Dobbert (1985) notes that play helps develop flexibility and promotes the generation of novelty, which is especially important because of the ever-changing environment in which humans live.

Although many non-Western cultures curtail much of the play of their children, what *does* occur is much less controlled, than in our Western society.

> In most non-Western cultures the opportunities for children to engage in self-organized play are greater because they are frequently considered to be competent at an earlier age than Western children and therefore there are fewer watchful eyes on their behavior. Along with this, play is often defined as behavior that does not need to be watched and strictly supervised, organized, or promoted by adults. Play is generally seen as natural, and while it may be actively discouraged in some societies, it is usually tolerated or ignored. (Schwartzman, 1984, p. 15)

This is also closely tied to the cohesiveness of tribal societies, which is not present in Western culture. "In most tribal societies no single institution meets the educational needs of the group. Consequently, all institutions in tribal societies are involved in the reproduction of the culture in the next generation" (McConnochie, 1981, p. 7). In fact, for the children in primitive societies, such learning is called informal because it occurs while the children are assisting their parents/kin with regular day-to-day activities. "There is no activity set aside solely to 'educate the child'. Social processes and institutions are structured to permit the child's acquisition of the basic skills, values, attributes, and customs which define appropriate adult behavior in the culture" (Scribner & Cole, 1973, pp. 554-5).

Evidently, whether the socialization of children takes place in Western or non-Western cultures, play appears to be the major vehicle through which this learning occurs.

Ethnography and Its Use In the Observation of Play

One might ask, at this point, what the purpose of further study and observation of children's play, when we *know* that play is a form of cultural transmission and is a socializer within society. But observing and studying play, *continues* to teach those of us interested in education, psychology, and culture[14]. In order to place the observation of children's play in context, a short discussion of the history of observing children's play will immediately follow. This discussion will give a background which will highlight the need for alternative and, especially, ethnographic observation in the study of children's play.

This interest in observing children's play has long been a part of psychology (including Piaget and Parten), education (especially early childhood educators), and anthropology (including Margaret Mead and Whiting & Whiting). Especially active in the observation of children's play have been the early childhood educators. They have used the observation of children's play to assist them in understanding children's development (as connected to psychology), and to assist them in developing curriculum for the children in their care. "In the organization of play as the curriculum of nursery schools, the theory of scientific child study was used to supervise and manage children's development" (Varga, 1991, p. 325). Contrary to Finnan (see below), it was felt by these early childhood educators, that they could assist the children's development by proper management of the children's play. "The fundamental

[14]But the caveat that Finnan (1982) puts on this observation of children's play is that we should not observe the play in order to manipulate the children or the play.

idea was that progressive development could be achieved through play. Age-appropriate play behaviors were considered to be those in accord with schedules of normative development" (Varga, 1991, pp. 325-6). Not only could play be used to assist the child to achieve particular levels of development, but play as an activity would also reveal the individual child's developmental progress (Varga, 1991).

But this use of play as a tool to assist the development of young children was not to be carried out by just anyone or in any location. It was felt that in order for appropriate development (through play) to occur, "children needed to be cared for in environments that provided expert supervision and management. By *expert,* it was meant that the nursery workers would be trained in methods of scientific child study and in child management" (Varga, 1991, p. 326). In fact, for nursery school teachers, proper training in observation and record keeping was absolutely necessary in order to *care* for the children.

Observation was such a central part of nursery schools, that without it, a developmentally appropriate program was not thought possible. Thus, it was felt that the combining of observation with knowledge of child development would produce results which would challenge the children to put forth their best efforts and which would have definite long-term social values (Varga, 1991).

> The nursery school teacher was to direct her scientific observations and her knowledge of child development onto children's play activities. By observing and measuring children's play behaviors, she would be able to map them and compare each child's development to standardized norms. Her findings were to be used to 'manage' children's play in order to ensure continued developmental progress or, if the child was precocious or

> immature in development, to intervene in the play to bring it on track with the norms[15]. (Varga, 1991, p. 327),

As a result it was felt that by using this scientific observation and knowledge of development that all children, through the use of play, would be brought to a specific 'standard'.

Not only was observation of children's play used to affect the children, it was also used to modify the nursery school teachers.

> Carrying out systematic observation was also identified as being a means for changing the viewpoint of nursery school teachers from what was considered an inadequate, personal familiarity with the children to what was considered the essential, scientifically distant one. Engagement in systematic observation was argued to lead 'gradually to the acquisition of an objective attitude in place of the usual feeling of personal responsibility for the child's behavior'. Through observation, the nursery school teacher would be reconstituted as a child study scientist. (Varga, 1991, p. 327 citing Blatz et al.)

In the end, the observation of children's play was expected to provide the "nursery school teacher with information regarding children's developmental progress. The teacher's responsibility was to ensure a continuous match between her observation findings and the observation of space and materials in the nursery school" (Varga, 1991, p. 328). And, thus, the observation of children's play became (or has become[16]) the means by which children's play was organized and controlled, rather than simply observed.

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[15]And the use of normative behavior, to compare children to, continues to be a major factor in the observation of children's play.

[16]And as such, the focus of early childhood education in Alberta is still much the same -- an education which must be managed. Alberta Education clearly states that "parents, early childhood staff and communities must provide materials, time and space so that play is an integral part of every child's day. They can *carefully plan* (emphasis added) and provide opportunities that capitalize on the natural tendency to play" (1984, p. 3).

This *control* of children's play has become a focus unto itself, and I believe this can be problematic, simply because the play is being altered as a result. In addition, the observer removes herself[17] (at least ideologically) from her surroundings, in spite of the fact that as an observer she brings her own biases and beliefs into all observations. But control and bias are not the only difficulties which have been encountered during the observations of play. Observing, itself, can result in information which is problematic and inaccurate. Finnan summarizes some of these problems --

> all players can read and send signals that set play behavior off from nonplay behavior. However, signals are rarely verbalized in player's description of play and even less often in adult research on play. Signaling is 'just one of those things we do', in play. It is something all players do, but they do not think about why, or what it means. This creates a dilemma; researchers cannot ignore what players cannot pay attention to. Players cannot play if they analyze their own actions, and researchers cannot analyze behavior if they do not understand what the players take for granted. (1982, p. 360)

Therefore, as observers, we must be extremely cautious with the assumptions which we draw from our observations, simply because of the nature of play.

Along with Finnan, I believe that the solution to this dilemma lies in the researcher's orientation and methodology. Both must be geared to discovering patterns of behavior central to the activity. It is thought that anthropological ethnography is well suited to this task because of its emphasis on structural interaction (Finnan, 1982). Ethnography meets the objective of observing children's play in a superior way because it is both "unobtrusive and non-directive" (Finnan, 1982, p. 377). Anthropological ethnography is especially

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[17] In this case the 'she/her' usually refers to me. But in the case of nursery school teachers of the past, she/her would have also been appropriate because of the exclusively female teaching force.

useful because anthropologists are trained to draw their assumptions from the data, "rather than coming to the site with *a priori* assumptions about the nature of children's play. Through cross-cultural experiences, anthropologists realize that one must not look for what should be there, but should try to understand what is there" (Finnan, 1982, p. 377).

Ethnography can work for the observation of children's play, in a number of ways, but most importantly because of the recognition of bias which the qualitative methods of research have. We must always be aware that

> *no context of observation, despite the care taken in its construction, is culturally neutral. Settings for behavior are socially organized, and they are embedded in larger systems of social organization which influence them.* Membership in the society that organizes the observational setting provides participants with 'special knowledge'. (Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition, 1979, p. 829)

And it makes no difference where this setting is located as "participants in any setting of observation use cultural knowledge to make sense of the task and to organize their behavior in it" (Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition, 1979, p. 829). To be sure, the interpretation of behavior[18], as perceived during the observation of children's play, requires that we understand both the setting itself and its relation to the larger social context (Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition, 1979). It is because of this focus on setting, within the context of the culture, that ethnography[19] works so well for the observation of children's play.

But one must explore *exactly why* ethnography and qualitative research is suitable for the observation of children's play, as viewed in a holistic manner. This

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[18]And we often forget that this is exactly what it is.

[19]We must, firstly, be aware of the similarity between cross-cultural psychology, described here, and cognitive anthropology. Secondly, as discussed by McDermott & Hood, we must be aware of the influence which educational psychology can have on ethnography -- "educational psychology can be a danger to ethnography if it is allowed to dictate key concepts in our description of schooling" (1982, p. 236).

is pointed out clearly by Lather in her assessment of empirical and scientific research. "Because we are not able to assume anything, we must take a self-critical stance regarding the assumptions we incorporate into our empirical approaches. No longer does following the correct method guarantee 'true' results: Method does not give truth, it corrects guesses" (1986, p. 65). Lather firmly believes, as do I, that present scientific research is not fully aware of its biases, and this can cause "the reification of constructs that are the projections of social biases, . . . (and) our best shot at present is to construct research designs that push us toward becoming vigorously self-aware" (1986, p. 66). Goetz & LeCompte add to this by saying that through ethnographic research we can actually derive a different viewpoint on much of the research. "As an archtypical construct, then, ethnography differs from experimentation and other positivistic designs, and its contributions to scientific advance lie in such differences" (1984, p. 7).

In order to understand why scientific research has become problematic and become truly aware of the biases which permeate this research, we must dig deep into the development of the research itself and the theories on which the research is built. The theories of human development, wherein most of the background in children's play is located, are of issue simply in the manner in which they are accepted. Theories of human development, once accepted into the prevailing culture, no longer operate simply "as descriptions of human and its growth. By their nature, as accepted cultural representations, they rather, give a social reality to the processes they seek to explicate and, to a degree, to the 'facts' that they adduce in their support" (Bruner 1986, p. 134). The theories are very much tied to the culture in which they are developed. In fact,

> the truths of theories of development are relative to the cultural contexts in which they are applied. But that relativity is not, as in physics, a question of logical consistency alone. Here it is also a question of congruence with

> values that prevail in the culture. It is this congruence that gives developmental theories -- proposed initially as mere descriptions -- a moral face once they have become embodied in the broader culture. (Bruner, 1986, p. 135)

And so as Lather (1986) has stated, these theories become reified constructs.

And obviously the entire evolution of these theories is closely tied to the dominant culture which proposes the developmental theories.

> Man is not free of *either* his genome *or* his culture. Human culture simply provides *ways* of development among the many that are made possible by our plastic genetic inheritance. Those ways are prescriptions about the canonical course of human growth. To say, then, that a theory of development is 'culture free' is to make not a wrong claim, but an absurd one. (Bruner, 1986, p. 135)

And Bruner points out that even though the theories may be challenged as inaccurate, it may be very difficult to dismiss them. "For the impact of ideas about mind does not stem from their truth, but seemingly from the power they exert as possibilities embodied in the practices of a culture (Bruner, 1986, p. 138). And Bruner believed that "once a culture has become gripped by an idea of mind, its uses, and their consequences, it is impossible to shed the idea, even when one has lost faith in it[20]" (1986, p. 138). Bruner (1986) also reminds us that once we take these theories as our givens and then go beyond them, what remains behind is not the theories, but their effects, and we must, indeed, be careful of this. As a result of these difficulties which scientific research presents, new styles of

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[20]In fact, this persistence of inaccurate theory continues to plague the study of children's play. Deficit theory (deficiency formulations), as an explanation for differences in cultures, was derived around the turn of the century in North America. In most literature it was thrown out as being inaccurate and useless, in the 1950's (Howard & Scott, 1981). However, resurgences of this theory continue to occur in the social sciences, and the study of children's play is no exception, where this theory is currently being used to describe the differences in play between children of different cultures and socio-economic classes. See: Johnson, Christie, & Yawkey, 1987, pp. 136-7, for a current example.

research *must* be developed and implemented. It is believed that through the use of qualitative research methodology and ethnography that many of these difficulties can be overcome, *with care*.

Because anthropology and ethnography specifically deal with culture, they do not deny that culture (and the bias which comes with that culture) helps the researcher formulate her background and, indeed, her own theories. Fetterman discusses ethnographic theory and elaborates on this idea, where theory is a guide to practice. "Whether it is an explicit anthropological theory or an implicit personal model about how things work, the researcher's theoretical approach helps define the problem and how to tackle it" (1989, p. 15). But these theories must still be explicitly stated as 'part and parcel' of the research project. Werner & Schoepfle recognize that ethnoscience ethnographies have two levels of theory. "The first is ethnoscience theory, or a theory of human cultural cognition, which deals with nature of cultural knowledge. . . . The second aspect of theory is that which motivates a particular ethnographic project"[21] (1987b, p. 316). As indicated, the researcher must clearly make her limitations and biases known. "To mitigate the negative effects of bias, the ethnographer must first make specific biases explicit. A series of additional quality controls such as triangulation, contextualization, and a nonjudgemental orientation place a check on the negative influence of bias[22]" (Fetterman, 1989, p. 11). And this recognition of bias should be carried out *throughout* the ethnographic research project and not just added to the end product. "An ethnographer should take into account when proposing an ethnographic undertaking the interaction between the proposed research and his or her personal style of working" (Werner & Schoepfle,

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[21] For this research project, I think my motivations are (or will become) quite clear. Obviously, the current research, with its particular focus, have been my main motivation. The limitations will be discussed later in this chapter and in Chapter Five.

[22] In other words, "ethnographers (should) commonly avoid assuming a priori constructs or relationships" (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984, p.8).

1987b, p. 321) -- in other words, the researcher should work *with* his or her personal strengths.

In order to show how ethnographic research can overcome the problems incurred in the observation of children's play, more specifics of the research method will be discussed. Firstly, a description and definition of ethnography will outlined by Goetz & LeCompte (citing Spradley & McCurdy and Erickson), wherein ethnographies are

> analytic descriptions or reconstructions of intact cultural scenes and groups. Ethnographies recreate for the reader the shared beliefs, practices, artifacts, folk knowledge, and behaviors of some group of people. Consequently, the ethnographic researcher begins by examining even very commonplace groups or processes in a fresh and different way, as if they were exceptional and unique. (1984, p. 2)

Besides making clear the biases and motivation for the research, the researcher must have more than a good understanding of the people being studied. The qualitative approach requires researchers to develop "empathy with people under study and to make concerted efforts to understand various points of view. Judgment is not the goal; rather, the goal is to understand the subjects' world and to determine how and with what criteria *they* judge it" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 219). Which is to say, that not only are the researcher's subjective experiences made plain, but the participant's experiences are also made clear. The result is a "depth of understanding often lacking in other approaches to research. This practice facilitates a more self-conscious attempt to control for observer bias and reactivity of participants" (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984, p. 9). In this ethnographers record and report "both their initial assumptions and their subjective reactions, often presenting audiences with both preconceptions and postconceptions" (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984, p. 9).

The ethnographic process is truly a way of studying human life, and ethnographic design demands investigative strategies conducive to cultural reconstruction which:

> 1) the strategies used elicit phenomenological data; 2) are empirical and naturalistic. Participant and nonparticipant observation are used to acquire first hand, sensory accounts of phenomena as they occur in real-world settings, and investigators take care to avoid purposive manipulations of variables in the study; 3) ethnographic research (which) is holistic. Ethnographers seek to construct descriptions of total phenomena within their various contexts and to generate from these descriptions the complex interrelationships of causes and consequences that affect human behavior toward, and belief about, the phenomena; and 4) ethnography (which) is multimodal or eclectic; ethnographic researchers use a variety of research techniques to amass their data. (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984, p. 3)

As outlined, Goetz & LeCompte stress the importance of the holistic nature of the setting, in ethnographic studies. That is, ethnographers usually study phenomena as they occur naturally rather phenomena which are manipulated by the researcher (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). "The naturalistic setting within which ethnography normally is conducted both facilitates on-the-spot analysis of causes and processes and precludes precise control of so-called extraneous factors" (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984, p. 10). In addition to the non-manipulative nature of ethnographic observation, ethnographers attempt to enter "unfamiliar settings without generalizing from their own experiences to the new setting and to enter familiar settings as if they were totally unknown. This suspension of preconceptions permits ethnographers to focus on participant constructs --

subjective or objective -- and sensitizes researchers to their own subjective responses" (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984, p. 10).

Ethnography can be used in a variety of areas including education, and the use of ethnography within the field of education can encompass several areas. "Broadly conceptualized (educational ethnography) includes studies of enculturation and acculturation from anthropology, studies of socialization and institutionalized education from sociology, and studies of sociocultural learning and cognition, of child and adult development from psychology" (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984, p. 13). It can be argued that educational ethnography fits into the study of child's play because of the need to bring to psychology (where much of the study of children's play has been focused and which has been based in scientific research) new styles of research[23]. In fact, Harrington (in Goetz & LeCompte) emphasizes that new research techniques "need to be separated from the disciplines to which they traditionally have been assigned" (1984, p. 25).

One of the methods of gathering data in ethnography has been participant observation. As opposed to interviewing, "participant observation focuses on what people do (cultural behavior) and what they make use of (cultural artifacts)" (Spradley, 1980, p. 12) [SEE Appendix I]. In viewing children's play, it is the cultural behavior and cultural artifacts which we are seeing.

As a researcher, the participant observer comes to a "social situation with two purposes: (1) to engage in activities appropriate to the situation and (2) to observe the activities, people, and physical aspects of the situation" (Spradley, 1980, p. 54). In contrast, the average participant comes to that same situation

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[23]However, McDermott & Hood point out a word of caution with regard to the 'marriage' of psychology and anthropology, in that "the two important tools for inquiry into the organization of social behavior -- the experiment and the social fact -- can be of more harm than good when used as instruments of proof and confirmation rather than suggestion. In combination they are deadly, giving us such burdens as statements about comparative intelligence of people from different groups (social facts) on the basis of their performance on standardized tests (experiments)" (1982, pp. 238-9).

with only the purpose, to participate. "In the process of carrying out these actions, this person does not normally want to watch and record everything else that occurs, describe all actors present, or make note of the physical setting" (Spradley, 1980, 54). It is the complexity of our social life that requires that the regular participant ignore much from conscious awareness (Spradley, 1980).

> If human beings actively tried to remember and catalog *all* the activities, *all* the objects, *all* the information they could perceive, and if they did this *all* the time, they would experience what some scholars have called *overload*. . . . The participant observer, in contrast, seeks to become explicitly aware of things usually blocked out to avoid overload. (Spradley, 1980, p. 55)

Not only does the participant observer have a "heightened sense of awareness, but he or she must also approach social life with a wide-angle lens, taking in a much broader spectrum of information" (Spradley, 1980, p. 56). In addition, the participant observer will need to experience being both an insider and an outsider while making the observations (Spradley, 1980), and also the participant observer needs to work at introspectiveness and to learn to use him/herself as a "research instrument" (Spradley, 1980, p. 57).

Participant observation can occur in varying degrees. Spradley outlines different types of participant observation, such as passive, moderate, active, and complete (1980). As defined by Spradley, the ethnographer engaged in passive participation "is present at the scene of action but does not participate or interact with other people to any great extent . . . Participant observation in public places often begins with kind of a detachment, (and) . . . moderate participation occurs when the ethnographer seeks to maintain a balance between being an insider and an outsider, between participation and observation" (1980, pp. 59-60). Both

passive and moderate[24] participant observation are suitable for the observation of children's self-organized play, and allow the study of the *context* of children's play.

As can be seen, ethnographic research and, specifically, participant observation, have much to offer the study of children's play.

The Setting and Its Limitations

As noted, the *setting* of the observations is a vital aspect of ethnographic research and participant observation. This particular research project will be removed, as far as possible, from the traditional setting. Most common, in psychological observations of children's play, are either the laboratory or (more recently) the school, day care, or nursery school. However, the locations as well as the theory which comes from the research at these sites are notably problematic.

> As powerful as (laboratory work) has been for generating structural models of cognition based on group data and statistical analysis, it runs into considerable difficulty when the analyst seeks conclusions about the cognitive machinery of individual organisms at any moment in time or in situations beyond the well-controlled experiment. The cognitive language allowed by laboratory procedures does not translate well for the description of everyday life scenes. (McDermott & Hood, 1982, p. 234)

And "it turns out that once we move beyond the highly constrained confines of our laboratory tasks and standardized tests, not only do we lose the technology for making statements about psychological process, we also lose the framework

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[24]Although I will not be able to gain active or complete participation (as described by Spradley, 1980), I will still be able to have access to children who are participating fully. And because of the presence of my son (DOB Oct. 04, 1988), I will have fuller participation than if observing on my own.

within which we are accustomed to *describe* intellectual behavior" (Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition, 1975, p. 830).

Although the school setting appears to give more freedom to the children and the researcher than does the laboratory, the school setting is still a confining and a controlling one which is chosen purely for convenience sake. Christie & Johnsen (1989) note that when reviewing play studies it is important to note that almost all research took place in preschool and kindergarten classrooms. "The popularity of schools as play research sites is largely a matter of convenience. Because schools offer preassembled groups of children, it is much easier to study play in schools than in nonschool settings[25]" (Christie & Johnsen, 1989, p. 318).

The reasons for taking my observations away from these institutions, is the strong influence which schools have on everyone around them. Bowles & Gintis (in Giroux) use the 'correspondence principle', which helps them explain the functioning of the schools. They argue that the "social relations of the school and classroom roughly mirror the social relations of the workplace, the final outcome being the reproduction of the social and class divisions" (1983, p. 57). As a result, the classroom or school can never be the neutral settings which many researchers assume that they are.

> Schools are much more than the neutral agency by which a monolithic society transmits its culture. In short, the core assumption of this group is that the schools are a gigantic bureaucratic agency which serves the interests of elites in industrial societies, which defines culture rather than transmits it, which contains the young and indoctrinates them rather than

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[25]Differences in play styles have long been found when comparing children from different cultures and socio-economic backgrounds. Fein & Stork (in Christie & Johnsen, 1987) believe that "such differences may suggest a deficit of opportunity. Lower-SES children may be socialized to restrict play to settings where researchers *fear to tread (e.g.. playgrounds and city neighborhoods)*" (emphasis added)(p. 115).

> educates them and which may be more notable for its economic than for its educational functions. (Burton, 1978, p. 56)

In addition to the *general* influence of the school on children's play, the school also makes a very strong distinction between work and play, thus influencing play in and around the school itself. Apple & King (in Giroux) say that as early as kindergarten, children are "taught quite quickly how to separate work from play, and how to treat the former as an activity that requires obedience, passivity, and teacher-dominated activities[26]" (1983, p. 59). In essence, "established education is essentially authoritarian, for it rests on the assumption that school children cannot be induced to learn unless they are made to" (Amonashvili, 1986, p. 87). And it is the teacher's "status in authoritarian education (which) is determined by his teaching activity. The teacher explains, narrates, shows, proves, dictates, asks demands, checks, and assesses. The pupils are obliged to listen attentively, observe, memorize, carry out and answer" (Amonashvili, 1986, p. 87). In fact, the entire process of instruction is "socially organized; the scope for bringing forces into play freely is limited here by the fact that, in developed societies, education is compulsory for all children to a certain age and by the fact that the teaching and learning methods used are imposed on the children" (Amonashvili, 1986, p. 87).

As well as, the school's dichotomy between work and play, and the general 'authoritarian' education, is the differentiation between 'free play' and 'supervised play'.

> However, all those who look objectively into the question of play at school have banished the term 'free play', which for them means unrestrained play, and also that of 'supervised play', which in fact ceases to

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[26]Sutton-Smith states that the "school as a cultural system stands in opposition to the subculture of children" (1982, p. 201).

be play[27], and have replaced it by the concept of accompanied play. (Michelet, 1986, pp. 116-17)

In spite of this change in definition, the play that does exist is still under the supervision of a teacher.

The ecology of the school can also provide many barriers to the play of children.

> As Schwartzman and other anthropologists have pointed out, play texts (the play events themselves) cannot be fully understood in isolation from play contexts (the social and physical settings in which the play occurs). School settings have a number of specific characteristics that may influence play patterns: the physical lay out; the availability of different types of materials; the explicit and implicit goals of the setting; and the amalgamation of ages, sexes, and other background variables of the children and adults in the environment. (Christie & Johnsen, 1989, p. 318)

And all these barriers must, at the very least be acknowledged by those doing research in this setting.

Besides the observations of children's play done in school settings, as has been mentioned, many observations have been made in daycare and nursery schools. However, these institutions too have a definite structure and curriculum, and as a result they strongly influence (and restrict) the children's play.

> In many nursery schools the play involving mother, daddy, and baby often attaches itself to the school's playhouse. Construction play similarly becomes attached to the block corner or the sand box. This attachment is

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[27]Although play has been part of the lower elementary school curriculum for some time there is obviously some question by Michelet and many other authors, as to whether or not children's play, by definition, can even exist within the confines of the classroom. "From the moment it becomes educational, play which is pre-eminently a gratuitous activity, with no other end than itself and the amusement it procures, ceases in fact to be play. From the moment that play is required to develop a particular skill or add to an individual's knowledge in a particular field, it is no longer play" (Michelet, 1986, p. 116).

> typically encouraged by the designers and owners, and *managers* (emphasis added) of the establishments. The child-players are taught to attach their various forms of play to these settings. (Denzin, 1975, p. 466)

Therefore, even in the daycare and nursery school settings, the play of the children is controlled, which affects the observations of play which are done in these settings.

In general, it can be said that students of play and games have tended to "divorce these interactional forms from interpersonal contexts that produce them. Thus the majority of existing formulations are context-free typologies, divorcing play and games from social setting. Furthermore, they seldom take account of the player's perspective in the playing or gaming episode, young child or otherwise" (Denzin, 1975, p. 461). However, the goal of the observation of children outside laboratory settings *should be* to increase the range of contexts to which we can legitimately generalize, rather than providing different constraints (Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition, 1975).

Although the above mentioned settings impose many limitations on the play of young children, my choice of location, a community playground also has its limitations. It is my contention, though, that the restrictions in a community playground are still less that those imposed by the laboratory, school and the surrounding school playground. However, it is still important that the limitations and boundaries of the community playground be thoroughly described and explored.

The work done by Mergen (1980) and Sutton-Smith (1982) explores the history of the development of community playgrounds, and the background assumptions onto which these playgrounds were established. The 'playground movement', as it has been called, was begun in the nineteenth century in the

United States. The main purposes of the development of playgrounds were to control the play of the poor and to remove the innocent children from the influences of the unsavory adults. "In the nineteenth century then we have a vigorous play life among the masses, with an equally vigorous protest by the middle classes that the idleness of this play life must be brought under control" (Sutton-Smith, 1982, p. 190). In fact, this social control of the play of the poor was an attempt to domesticate the 'uncontrollable' boys and rid society of the gambling and idleness of the poor (Sutton-Smith, 1982). It was felt that too "many children were 'doing nothing' and 'fooling around'. The proper kind of play could teach children leadership[28], cooperation, develop skills and health, and encourage imagination and creativity" (Mergen, 1980, p. 199). In their attempts to establish playgrounds, the playground movement participants spent much of their time lobbying the government for money. "Not only did they lobby for government support and regulation of playgrounds, but they wished to control nickelodeons, penny arcades, and pool halls which competed with playgrounds for the play time of older children" (Mergen, 1980, p. 198)[29].

Indeed, much of the push towards the development of playgrounds was based on the educational theories of the times. Groos, a theorist, believed that children's future could be controlled if one looked at their play (Sutton-Smith, 1982), and the playgrounds were thought to be "cure for the ills of the city" (Sutton-Smith, 1982, p. 192). The values that the children were supposed to

> derive from these forms of organization were held to be analogous to the values derived by upper status persons from sports or from contacts with

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[28]A question, here, might be did these middle-class playground proponents *really* want these lower-class children learning about leadership?

[29]It should be noted that the advent of playgrounds and their equipment also coincided with the first amusement parks. "Swings, see saws, and other gymnastic equipment had been used by children for many years, of course, but their appearance in the municipal playground coincides with the construction and success of the first commercial amusement parks, with their carousels, roller coasters, and ferris wheels" (Mergen, 1980, p. 200).

> nature. The leisure values of the upper class groups were thus the primary source of notions about the leisure values that could be organized for the poor. (Sutton-Smith, 1982, p. 192)

Similar to the organization of the observation and curriculum of kindergartens, the *supervision* of playgrounds was vitally important. "Close supervision by well trained professional playground managers was more important than the amount or kind of playground equipment" (Mergen, 1980, p. 199). Again, the 'trained professionals' were responsible for the control of children's play.

> The control of the playground was furthered with its enclosure by a fence. Once the land became available, the next step in equipping it was fencing. Henry Curtis was a staunch advocate of fences to keep out 'rowdies' and make discipline easier, but these were not his only reasons. 'The fence also makes of the school yard an institution and helps to create loyalties'. Within the playground there should be fences between the boys and girls play areas. 'The reasons for it are obvious and sufficient'. Curtis wrote, 'there are often loose girls and always loose boys coming to the playgrounds, and it is better not to have them together or where they can corrupt other children'. (Mergen, 1980, pp. 200-1, citing Curtis, 1913, 16)

But by isolating play, "the playground movement reinforced the distinction between play and other activities. Whatever it might be, Jay B. Nash argued in 1927, play was not idleness, recreation, or amusement" (Mergen, 1980, p. 203, citing Nash, 1927). With this action, the playground movement further pushed the distinction and dichotomy of play versus work.

It can be said that the basic themes which "run through the early literature on playgrounds are regulation, development, and safety. . . . The playground, as *extension of the school* (emphasis added), should produce children who could

obey rules, cooperate, and develop their physical and mental skills[30]" (Mergen, 1980, pp. 202-3). In essence, the playground had become another institution which was to be controlled.

Iona and Peter Opie (1969) in their book, Children's Games in Street and Playground, also investigated the outdoor play of children. Rather than within the playgrounds, they found that children's deepest pleasure was "to be away in the wastelands"[31] (1969, p. 11). And that when children are "herded together in the playground, which is where educationalists and the psychologists and the social scientists gather to observe them, their play is markedly more aggressive than when they are in the street or in the wild places" (Opie & Opie, 1969, p. 13). This is a particularly important caution, and perhaps even a limitation, which must be taken into account when one bases their observations in a community playground.

Opie & Opie (1969) also note the excessively rough play which seems to occur on school playgrounds. "Such behavior would not be tolerated amongst the players in the street or the wasteland; and for a long time we had difficulty reconciling these accounts with the thoughtfulness and respect for the juvenile code that we had noticed in the quiet places" (Opie & Opie, 1969, p. 14). Perhaps it is simply because the playground is designed, chosen, and controlled by adults, that the children do not feel in control, as they do in their 'wastelands'. Or as Schwartzman ponders, perhaps "children are more likely to explore their individual relationships with each other when interacting in restricted environments, and when in an open environment group relationships (we - other, adult versus child) assume prominence" (1984, p. 15).

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[30]It is interesting to note that even the Adventure playgrounds of today, "are engineered by upper-class intellects with little actual knowledge of the kind of behavior of the children they will actually serve" (Sutton-Smith, 1982, p. 193).

[31]Finnan noted, as well, that spontaneous play "flourishes away from adult influence, expectations, and approval" (1982, p. 359).

Closely related to this control of children's playgrounds by adults, is the observation of children's play, again, carried out by adults -- the researcher's viewpoint. Bauman (1982) refers to this as *'adultocentrism'*, wherein the play and definitions of that play are described in adult terms rather than in the children's terms. Bauman believes that when studying anything involving children, a study of the children's peer group culture needs to be included. Burton (1978) expands on this concept by stating that there

> seems to be little professional interest in the lives of the young per se. Applied anthropology rests on the assumption that attempts to intervene in the lives of people ought to derive from an informed awareness of the cultural patterns of such groups. It is people who should come first, not what one wishes to do, or even for, them. In terms of public education, this means that teachers[32], administrators, and consultants could place more emphasis on deriving their plans and proposals from an understanding of the cultural patterns of youth (or youths). Psychologists and others often study the young as objects to be taught or managed or counseled. What is needed, to . . . provide some balance, is a systematic interest in the cultural lives of the young in their <u>own</u> terms. (p. 58)

The problem is further exemplified by Miracle in his work with the Aymara, where it has been suggested that in cultures where children are an economic asset there is not much play. "According to previous reports [e.g.., Carter, 1971, 132], this might have been held as valid for the Aymara. I would suggest that these may have been somewhat misleading, since Aymara children do engage in quite a bit of play. The view of these earlier reports may be due to the adult perspectives of the researcher, or to the perceptions of the children involved" (1976, p. 104). It

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[32]Goetz confirms this by stating that when understanding the cognitive models used by children, the "findings indicate that students conceptualize the school world in terms remarkably different from adult views" (1978, p. 13).

can be said that 'adultocentrism' and its perspective, in general, can cause difficulties when drawing assumptions about children's play.

This 'adultocentrism' corresponds closely with the whole role of the ethnographer, as a researcher.

> But there is no way to avoid the fact that the ethnographer himself or herself is a factor in the inquiry. Without the general human capacity to learn culture, the inquiry would be impossible. The particular characteristics of the ethnographer are themselves an instrument of the inquiry, for both good and bad. For good, it is important to stress, because the age, sex, race, talents of the ethnographer may make some knowledge accessible that would be difficult to access to another. For bad, as we all recognize, because of partiality. Since partiality cannot be avoided, the only solution is to face up to it, compensate for it as much as possible, to allow for it in interpretation. (Hymes, 1982, p. 29)

Werner & Schoepfle reiterate this by saying that part "of becoming 'cultured' in relations to a particular culture involves learning to interpret appropriately what can be observed 'with one's own eyes'. There is no guarantee, coming from another culture, that one's ethnographic observations are not intrinsically ethnocentric" (1987a, p. 259) -- or in Bauman's words, adultocentric.

But perhaps through the recognition of the limitations and biases of ours and our research, we can strive towards more holistic descriptions of children's play.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that the theories mentioned, clearly point to using ethnographic methodology for the observations of children's self-organized play and games. These theories also direct the research to a setting(s) where there is little (or as little as possible) external control over children's play. It is my contention that besides observing the street play of children (as Opie & Opie have done), the most ideal setting is the community or local playground.

Chapter Three

SURVEY OF RELATED LITERATURE AND RESEARCH

Introduction

This chapter will examine the literature and research which deals with children's play. Because the study of children's play is so large, this literature review will focus on only the three areas of play literature which are specifically related to my study.

The first part of the review will look at the anthropological study of play. It is obvious, because of the topics involved, that this area is directly related to my research. This section of the literature survey will look at the ethnographic study (in both Western and non-Western cultures) of children's play, and also studies which use cognitive anthropology as a focus.

The next section of the literature review will deal with research on folklore and outdoor play. Because the setting of my study is out-of-doors in a non-school location, this research on outdoor play and folklore is especially relevant.

The final section will look briefly at some of the major psychological studies of children's play. The developmental analysis of children's play has been the focus of much work in this area, and has also affected the research in other disciplines. For this reason, I believe it is necessary to include some background information which may have bearing on my study.

The Anthropological Study of Play

The anthropological study of play ranges over a vast area and a certain amount of this needs to be covered in a literature review such as this. However I feel that initially, I must review two important, but more general, works which link play and culture. The first of these is the book Homo Ludens by J. Huizinga. The second of these, is the book Transformations: The Anthropology of Children's Play by H. B. Schwartzman. Following the above, broader discussion, I will concentrate on two specific areas, for the purposes of this literature study. The first area of research which I will examine is the ethnographic study of play. This focus will concentrate on two particular types/areas of ethnographic research on play: the ethnographic study of the play of children of non-Western cultures, and the ethnographic study of the play of children of Western cultures. The last area of anthropological study of play which I will examine is the cognitive anthropological study of children's play.

The earliest work in the anthropological study of children's play was usually contained within the larger studies of entire societies. As a result, children's play was most often placed within the area of socialization and child-rearing of the group, and not given emphasis unto itself. Because anthropology has almost always viewed the culture as a whole, it is only reasonable that play be studied as part of the greater culture. Many of these perspectives are exemplified by the work done by Margaret Mead. Mead (1968) in her New Guinea study describes the Manus children's play with regard to its relationship with the socialization of these children[33]. However, Mead's work does not focus on the

[33]Most often Mead discusses the imitative play of these children, wherein the children copy the activities of their parents.

play of these children in isolation, but instead looks at their play as part of growing up in Manus society.

In the last few years, however, the anthropological study of children's play has become an area of study unto itself[34]. It is really hard to say exactly when play was extracted as an entity of separate anthropological study, but Huizinga's 1950 study of play, as a distinct element of culture, was likely the first to bring the study of play to the forefront. As mentioned, Huizinga ascertained that play, while being a part of culture, was actually older that culture itself[35]. Huizinga did not specifically study children's play but instead looked at play in its broader context and discussed play and its significance in all aspects of human life. For example, play as it is connected to law, war, knowing, poetry, philosophy, and art. In spite of the general sense which Huizinga studied play, he was one of the first to bring the study of play and culture together. From Huizinga's emphasis on the study of play as a means of understanding culture have come many recent studies of the play of children.

The second general piece is Schwartzman's look at the anthropology of children's play, in Transformations: The Anthropology of Children's Play (1978). Like Huizinga, Schwartzman takes a broader view of play and culture, but takes an additional step by focusing on children's play. The chief accomplishment of this book is a compilation of most literature on children's play and anthropology up to 1978. Schwartzman makes her main point in the final chapter (also echoed in her later publications), which says that we must look at the processes by which play unfolds, and must also consider the relationships *between* the players and activities. These foci were new, and as such represent the important contribution of Schwartzman's work in the study of children's play. As a result these

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[34]This is exemplified by the establishment of The Association for the Anthropological Study of Play in 1974 by a group of Canadian and American academics.

[35] Huizinga maintains that this is because of the fact that animals also play.

observations have given rise to the foci of many of the more recent anthropological studies of children's play.

The Play of Non-Western Children

The first of the more specific areas of research to be examined will be the play of children from non-Western cultures. An overview of these studies will provide some background in the area of anthropology and play. It appears that ethnographic studies of children's play in other cultures tend to organize themselves into two basic areas: the classification of play and games, and the description of the play which has been seen during field work.

Non-Western Children -- Classification Studies

The work by Miracle (1976) is the best example of the classification-type of study. Miracle (1976) analyzed the play of the Aymara Indian (Chukinapi) children, and although he has given some description of their play, he has also presents an inventory of their games and play. Using the inventory of games and play, Miracle then explored the functions of some of these games and play forms. Miracle (1976) found three functions of Aymara play and games: 1) "play reinforces the adult nonadult dichotomy" (p. 104) ; 2) "play and games teach children some skills necessary for adult life, and children's socialization includes the internalization of the idea that a high premium is to be placed on work" (p. 104) ; and 3) " much of the play and games of children teach cooperation and provide for patterned interaction among peers. This interaction in play helps form the basis for future relationships" (p. 104).

Non-Western Children -- Descriptive Studies

There are more ethnographic studies using the descriptive narrative to describe children's play [Ager(1975), Briggs(1979), Bennett, Baker, & Nelson (1988), Salamone & Salamone(1991), Harkness & Super(1983), Lancy(1975),

Fortes(1938), Rosenstiel(1975), and Farrer(1975)]. These studies all come from extensive field work with particular cultural groups. Generally, it can be said that the studies link the children's play to the culture of the group studied and to the greater socialization process of the children.

Ager (1975), and Briggs (1979) and Bennett et al. (1988) carried out comprehensive studies of the play of Inuit/Eskimo peoples. Ager (1975) and Bennett et al. (1988) have done specific research on the storyknifing[36] of the young Alaskan girls. They believed that storyknifing assisted the girls in their socialization, and Bennett et al. also maintained that this activity helped the girls deal with the changes occurring in their Inuit/Eskimo society (which was due to increased industrialization). Briggs (1979), on the other hand, looked at all aspects of Inuit socialization where children's play and games were only a segment of the larger process.

Salamone & Salamone (1991), Harkness & Super (1983), Lancy (1975), and Fortes (1938) have all carried out research in various countries on the African continent. Salamone & Salamone (1991) took an in depth look at three particular Nigerian children's games. They then studied the relation of those games to adult supervised play (two of these games could be considered in this category). In the end, Salamone & Salamone emphasized the study and the observation of the 'playful child', rather than stressing whether or not the play is adult- or child-structured.[37]

Harkness & Super (1983) in their study of the Kipsigis community of Kenya, looked at how knowledge of the whole culture can be used to predict children's play (rather than vice versa). Their goal in this research was to "gain a

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[36]Storyknifing is an activity which involves telling a story using a knife, usually a table knife, and carving or drawing a story or the characters into the mud or snow. This is exclusively an activity which young girls participate in.

[37]This is an interesting viewpoint considering my emphasis on children's self-organized play, wherein, to paraphrase Salamone & Salamone (1991), there can be child-structured play which is not much fun and adult-structured play which is fun.

greater understanding of the interactions between universal processes in human development and functioning, and the specific environments that different cultures provide for their expression" (p. 97). Despite their emphasis on the description of the children's play behaviors, even Harkness & Super use a categorization technique[38] (play, idleness, and work) to evaluate the children's behavior. However, Harkness & Super do not seem to use these categories to draw their conclusions, and they summarize their work by stating that "parents in different cultures choose different domains for developing desired characteristics in their children" (1983, p. 102).

Another study of African children's play is Lancy's (1975) research done with the Kpelle in Liberia. Lancy examines and classifies the traditional playforms of the Kpelle children, and looks at the functions of play in adult work which the children are involved in. Because the town where Lancy did his research was experiencing much change, Lancy went on to examine the impact of this change on the children's play. His initial research yielded over ninety traditional playforms which Lancy grouped into eight major categories. However, Lancy found that two particular aspects of the change which the town was experiencing affected the children's play, those being the wheel and the ball. Lancy found that these two additions to the children's play, spawned some significant make-believe play. This make-believe play, using the ball and wheel, contrasted with the lack of prior make-believe play before. However, Lancy noted that these changes were most noticeable in those children who were seven years or older and also attended school -- so it was hard to determine the exact

[38]These categories are problematic for a variety of reasons, probably the most important of these is the fact that the categories are not those chosen by the children even though it is their activities which are being evaluated. In addition, the use of categories can limit the description of the children's activities, and when the activities are changing so frequently (as they do with children's play), I would question just how accurate the tallies of these activities might be.

source of these changes. Lancy concluded that, in general, traditional games and play were decreasing in Kpelle culture.

Fortes (1938) in his study of the Tallensi people of the Gold Coast equates the play of the Tale children with education (and socialization). Fortes found that the Tale children learned through three fundamental processes: "mimesis, identification, and co-operation" (1938, p. 475), and found that these processes were intimately connected with play which he found to be "the paramount educational exercise of Tale children" (1938, p. 475). Like other anthropologists who have studied play, Fortes saw the play of the Tale children to be closely linked to their everyday life and socialization. Fortes also discovered that the Tale children had a great number of highly complex games, and also participated in much imaginative play especially those children between the ages of six to ten.

Three additional studies by Rosenstiel (1975), Farrer (1975), and Philips (1970) conclude this section of the review of non-Western children's play. Rosenstiel (1975) viewed the interrelationship between role of traditional games and the process of socialization among the Motu of Papua New Guinea. Rosenstiel maintained that traditional games "serve(d) to reinforce the stability and continuum of the culture. As a basic part of the socialization process, they represent(ed) steps in the child's mastery of his physical, social, and valuational environment" (1975, p. 66). Rosenstiel asserted that the games of the Motu children were played in order to improve physical skill in preparation for adult life. She also noted that the games were cooperative in nature.

Farrer (1975), by contrast, looked at the playground play of Mescalaro Apache children and the implications of this play for education. The objective of Farrer's research was to develop a technique that used the free play of young children as an instrument to improve communication between teachers and children, from other than mainstream American backgrounds. Farrer's major

findings and conclusions were that the metacommunication in play (culture) reflected the overall communication of the Mescalaro people, i.e.. that relatives play together; verbal interaction is minimal; correction is done by example and learning occurs by observation; physical closeness is desirable; and circularity is important while linearity is merely tolerated.

Philips (1970) looked at the rules for appropriate speech usage for the children of Sahaptin and Chinook Indians on the Warm Springs Indian Reservation in central Oregon. What is significant for my study are Philips' observations of the play of the Warm Springs children on the school playground. She noted that when the children organized their own play they frequently become involved in games of team competition. Philips contrasts this play to that of non-Indian children, and remarks that the Indian children were able to sustain "game activities for longer periods of time and at younger ages" (1970, p. 85). In addition, Philips noted that much multi-age play took place between the Indian children where they consistently played with greater numbers of children (than non-Indian children), and "maintain(ed) friendships and teams with children from classes in school other than their own" (1970, p. 85).

The Play of Western Children

The play of Western children has also been extensively studied through the use of ethnographic methods. It is interesting to note that the play of these children, rather than being observed within the greater culture as the previous non-Western studies indicate, is usually observed in affiliation with the educational institution/s: the school. An overview of a variety of these studies will be done in order to reveal some of their findings with regard to children's play. Although most of these studies have been carried out in the setting of the school (including day cares, play schools, and kindergartens), a few of the studies

have been done outside this setting. This discussion will be split with two parts: 1) studies which have been conducted in settings other than schools, and 2) studies which have taken place in schools and on school grounds.

Western Children -- Studies in Non-School Settings

Studies of children's play, in Western culture, rarely occur outside of some association with the school or its playground. However, two non-school setting studies stand out as exemplary in this category, and these are the studies by Kelly-Byrne (1989) and Goodwin (1990). In her study, Kelly-Byrne (1989) studied the play behavior of a seven-year old child, ethnographically, by playing *with* this child, and then recording their interactions. She was "interested in discovering how play occurred and was given expression in the home" (1989, p. xvii), which contrasts with most of the research which occurs in school settings[39]. Kelly-Byrne's conclusions highlight the complexities and flexibility of children's play. In addition, she emphasized the need for children to have control in their play, and the need for researcher to look *seriously* at this play.

Goodwin (1990) studied linguistic interactions by looking at the street play of Black children[40] in West Philadelphia. Her work was based in ethnographic methodology and data was gathered using field notes and audio tape recordings. Goodwin chose to observe children's street play "rather than participating in an institution such as a school, administered by adults, where adult intervention in children's activities is quite common, (she) was able to observe activities controlled entirely by children" (1990, p. 20). Although she focused her study on the linguistic interaction of these children, she drew a number of conclusions with regard to their play. Most significantly, Goodwin

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[39]Kelly-Byrne makes two very important notations in her review of prior studies. Firstly, there are no studies that are based on actually playing with a child over an extended period of time. Secondly, she notes the "emphasis in the literature (is) on ages 3 through 5 as being the golden years of make-believe play"(1989, p. 1).

[40]Goodwin notes that this is what the children call themselves, not Afro-Americans.

notes that the street play of these children was neither bound by age nor sex, which contradicts the studies on children's play which have been carried out in school settings. In conclusion, Goodwin stressed the need for "more studies of neighborhood groups (which) are needed to see how extensively other groups of children have access to the range of activities or possibilities for cross-sex or cross-age interaction which occur(red) on Maple Street" (1990, p. 285).

Western Children -- Studies in School Settings

The studies which have been carried out in association with schools will be divided into two areas of discussion: those which have occurred within the walls of the classroom, and those which have occurred on the school grounds. Because of the focus of my study, the present discussion will only highlight one of the more pertinent classroom studies, and an additional study which is carried out within the school but not the classroom. The first of these is a Canadian study by Weininger & Daniel (1992) and was aimed at understanding children's concepts of play. However, rather than using observation techniques, as most studies of children's play do, Weininger & Daniel used ethnographic interviews to discover how children understood play. Their study ran into a variety of problems because of the way the questions were designed and the semantics of those questions, and also "because of the small group size and the homogenous quality of the children studied" (1992, p. 68). However, Weininger & Daniel did conclude that "children *see* play as fun, and play *because* it is fun" (1992, p. 68).

The second school-based study is one done by Reifel (1984) in which he looked at play in an elementary school cafeteria. He argued that children's play, in its child-like-form still occurred in schools (contrary to the thoughts of many researchers[41]) but in order to find it we may need to look in places where play might not be expected. Reifel used Opie & Opie's (1959) study of British

[41] This would probably concur with my thoughts to a certain degree. But more precisely, it would be very difficult to find self-organized play within the institution of the school.

children's outdoor play and games to compare to his observations of cafeteria play. He found that the children did engage in a number of types of play, including 'wit and repartee', 'just for fun', 'riddles', 'guile', 'jeers and torments', 'pranks', and 'pretend' (1984, p. 30), which were all types of child-initiated play (as indicated in the Opie & Opie study). Reifel believed that this self-initiated play in the cafeteria served many social needs, as any other self-initiated play does. He found that leadership, maintenance of status, exploration of social roles, and entertainment were all accomplished through play in the school cafeteria.

There have been many studies which have used the school playground to view children's play activities. There are probably a couple of reasons for the popularity of this setting. Firstly, this location gives researchers a chance to see a form of children's play which is much less controlled than any play which might occur in the classroom. Secondly, this setting is one where, ten months of the year, children can be located and seen playing. The following section will focus on this play of children in the school playground.

Pellegrini (1989) and Boulton & Smith (1989) have all focused their studies on the rough and tumble play of boys on the school playground. Pellegrini (1989) used observation and participant observation to categorize the rough and tumble play. He concluded that the interpretation of this play (i.e.. whether it is play or aggression) depended on whether the child involved was popular or 'rejected'. Boulton & Smith (1989), in their study of rough and tumble play used both categorization and sequential analysis to examine the play.

Bell & Walker (1983) in their study looked at the playground play of 3-, 4- and 5-year old children from two day care centers. The researchers looked at the social play of young children, and also at the behaviors exhibited with regard to the group's play space and play objects. Bell & Walker found that frequent and

diverse social interactions took place in the context of the play group. They also found that play group members "directed possessive behaviors toward objects and structures in their immediate play area" (1983, p. 143).

Polgar (1978) examined the social interaction between black and white sixth graders in free play periods on the school playground. She found that two patterns of play were present: competition between black and white teams, and play in mixed-color teams which appeared to have a lot of internal conflict.

In the last study of school playground play, Finnan (1982) looked at self-structured chase games in the school playground. She drew four observations from her research: 1) spontaneous play offered a positive learning environment; 2) children's involvement in spontaneous play reflects sex-role acquisition; 3) spontaneous play demanded a degree of cultural knowledge which some children do not possess; and 4) the normal flow of children's play must remain unaltered for relevant research.

Cognitive Anthropology's Study of Children's Play

Besides cultural anthropology's study of children's play, other areas of anthropology have researched this topic. Included in this work, is cognitive anthropology's study of children's play. This research has given light to some important information on children's play. Similar to the above discussion on ethnographic studies on children's play, studies which use cognitive anthropology as a basis, also have a range of settings in which they were carried out. These vary from the nursery school and preschool, to playbuses (obsolete buses converted to mobile play-centres), to play in the desert by Bedouin Arab children. For example, Sutton-Smith & Magee (1989) in their study looked at order and disorder, what they call reversibility, in children's open-ended nursery school play. They concluded that "elements of order and disorder are as relevant

for interpreting children's open-ended play as they were for interpreting their games. (And they further concluded) that children at play are first and foremost performers" (1989, p. 61) It is this disorder that playground supervisors find difficult to understand and as a result they want to do away with outdoor play and recess, but as Sutton-Smith & Magee point out this is part of the play act/s, and is absolutely necessary.

Lubeck (1985), in her study of two different preschool classrooms, used participant observation to compare the education and play of the children. As with many other studies, Lubeck compared the children of two different cultural and ethnic (white and black) groups, in an effort to discern specific differences in them. Using an early childhood focus, Lubeck examined the use of time, the use of space, the activities and materials, and patterns of interaction within these two preschool classrooms.

Child (1983) in her study of English children's play attempted to "describe the relevance of socio-cultural influences, emanating from ethnic group and social class[42], to variations in preschool children's play" (p. 169). In her conclusions, Child found that both social class and ethnicity do have significant influence on children's play, particularly with regard to the modes of play (scope, passivity/activity, and sociability) which she used to describe the play.

Ariel & Sever (1980) in their study of Bedouin Arab children, asked "to what extent and how are urbanization, modernization and formal education reflected in the spontaneous play activities of the children of a 'traditional' society?" (p. 164). They found that "important aspects of the content, structure and development of individual and social play are not universal, but culture-bound"(1980, p. 174). Additionally, they found that the "expressive language of

[42]This comparison of social class and ethnicity and their inter-relatedness with play are very common in studies which emphasize both cognitive aspects and psychology. More of these comparative studies will be discussed in the section of this review which looks at psychology and its study of children's play.

make-believe play (was) closely culture-bound in both structure and content" (1980, p. 175), and that play tutoring of these children did not seem to make their play any more dynamic and colorful or richer in theme.

To conclude this section of the literature review, it can be seen that studies which focus on play from anthropology have many different emphases, but usually use ethnography as their methodology. Those which have been done in non-Western cultures frequently look at the interaction between the children's play and their successful socialization. On the other hand, the studies of Western children's play tend to revolve around the location of the play, that being the school. The cognitive anthropologists appear to study children's play in light of its cognitive attributes.

Folklore and Outdoor Play

In this section of the literature review, I will concentrate on discussing the research which deals with folklore and outdoor play. These are both part of outdoor play and therefore are very important to a review of the literature where the focus of a study, such as mine, takes place in an outdoor playground. This aspect of the literature review chapter will be separated into three areas in order to provide clarity in the review. The first section will look at classification or compilation studies of children's outdoor play and games. The second part will discuss the literature which deals more generally with playground play. The final section will concentrate on children's folklore play or what Sutton-Smith (1981) and Hughes (1991) have referred to as "folkgames"[43].

[43]It is important to note that folkgames are usually those which occur on the playground, or *away* from the school and the home, and therefore it is necessary to include that in a review of literature for my research.

Classification/Compilation Studies of Children's Games and Play

There a number of exemplary studies in this area of the study of children's play. Three particular studies stand out in this field, Iona and Peter Opie's (1969) study of British street games and play; Sutton-Smith's (1972 c. 1959) collection of New Zealand children's games; and Sluckin's study of Oxford children's school yard play. Sutton-Smith (1972) and Opie & Opie (1969) were probably the first researchers to attempt to study children's play outside the clinic or school setting. Both of the studies endeavored to gain some knowledge of the play of children where such play was not under the influence of adult supervision, or what Opie & Opie refer to as in the "wastelands" (1969, p. 11). Because their research was historical in nature, Sutton-Smith and Opie & Opie looked for change in the children's play over time and found changes had, indeed, occurred. Generally, they found that the self-organized play of children seemed to have decreased historically with the involvement of adults. But all the researchers were adamant that this decrease may have been due only to adult researcher inability to observe *all* the play of children. And Opie & Opie maintained that "in the long run, nothing extinguishes self-organized play more effectively than does action to promote it" (1969, p. 16). In addition, as we age, we become much less aware of the content of the play, which can be explained thus, "a 5-year-old in his first term at school may well be aware of more self-organized games than a 15-year-old about to leave school" (1969, p. 6). The main difference between the Opie study and that done by Sutton-Smith, was that the Opie study was a classification type and the Sutton-Smith study was a compilation of the play and games of New Zealand children.

Sluckin (1981) has also studied the outdoor play of British school children and has published a combination classification/compilation study. Sluckin uses participant observation (during recess time) to gather his data in the natural

environment of the playground, in a mainly working-class neighborhood. In his study, Sluckin concluded that much of the play reported in the Opie's studies (1959; 1969), which were located in backyards and on sidewalks, also flourishes in school playgrounds. In addition to the classification/compilation nature of his study, Sluckin analyzed the politics and general rules which evolved out of the playground play. In his final chapter, Sluckin also addressed some important questions such as 'what do children learn in the playground?' and 'what do games teach?' -- in essence, he concludes that the playground is preparation for adulthood.

Rosenstiel (1977) also studied children's outdoor play, specifically those games of black American children. She looked at both games which were related to school and those games which were played within the black community itself. In fact, Rosenstiel found that the games fit into number of categories[44] and occurred at a number of locations: "some are played in and around schools; some are street games; others are social games played at home or out-of-doors" (1977, p. 35). She concluded her article by saying that despite the universality of play it is "affected by the socioeconomic context in which it is performed" (1977, p. 38). Still, she felt that by virtue of the games themselves and their manner of presentation, they showed "extraordinary adaptability, and the ability of young adults to simulate early childhood and to recall vividly the games in which they had participated as young children" (1977, p. 38).

A look at two additional studies will be the last in the category of classification/compilation studies. The first of these is one done by Chick (1989), where he argued that the categorization of children's games has routinely been done by the researchers, and that in order get a true understanding of how these

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[44]These categories have been described in the research of Opie & Opie, Sutton-Smith, and Sluckin and can be summarized into the following categories: leader games, chasing games, kissing games, card games, singing games, guessing games of skill, and role reversal games.

games are linked together we must ask the players how they would organize their games. He suggests that "folk categorizations" must be used, and there is a great need for more research of this type.

Holmes (1991) takes up Chick's challenge, by using emic (children's) constructs to classify children's kindergarten activities. "It is based upon terms they employ so that the result is a folk taxonomy rather than one defined etically" (1991, p. 44). Holmes based her research on fieldnotes taken in two kindergarten classrooms[45] during over 300 hours of observation, and transcriptions of tape recordings of the children's own descriptions of their play activities. Holmes found that the children had no problem distinguishing the playtime activities.

> For them, play was broken down into several categories based upon the features or attributes of particular play activities. This resulted in emergence of categories which were distinguished by number of participants (e.g., teams), type of play (e.g., games or chase), territory (e.g., those which occur on the table), and materials employed (e.g., dolls). (1991, p. 48)

However, Holmes cautioned that this scheme may not be employed universally by all kindergarten children, and that this type of research would be better used to collect folk terms and game categories from young children.

Playground Studies

Studies about playgrounds tend to come from a number of different disciplines; however playground studies will be discussed together here, as they all tend to revolve around the design and organization of children's play and playground use. Three of these studies were published in the late 1950s and mid

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[45]Although this study could easily have been included in the discussion in the previous section (on classroom studies), because Holmes uses Chick's 'folk categorizations', it is best included in this section of the review.

to late 1960s. The first of these, was done by the Royal Canadian Air Force in 1959, to look at the play needs of children, was directed at meeting the needs of these children's play. This booklet is essentially a 'how-to' manual for training playground leaders and community people, and relies heavily on routines and the organization of all activities. The second of these playground studies was done by Hole (1966) and examined the use of space and development of playgrounds and play areas around housing estates in London, England. In her research, Hole took a detailed look at how playgrounds were used and specific design implications for new playgrounds. The third and final of these how-to works comes from Lady Allen of Hurtwood (1968). In her book, Planning for Play, she looked at just about every aspect of playground play including nursery schools, supervised playground play, adventure playgrounds, play parks, neighborhood playgrounds, play for the normal child in an abnormal setting, and play for handicapped, subnormal and maladjusted children. All of the above mentioned works rely heavily on photographs and graphic illustrations to describe their 'ideal' playground and the play which should occur within it.

Another of these 'how-to' books, but a much more recent one, comes from Frost & Klein (1983) and provides step-by-step procedures for developing creative and safe playgrounds. In one sense this book is very similar to Lady Allan's book which also integrates some of the background information on play with the design of the playground itself. For example, Frost & Klein (1983) first examine the theories behind play and the importance and nurture of play before proposing any plans for the makeup of the playground. However, like the above mentioned publications, this book is full of photographs and graphic illustrations to aid those who design playgrounds and play areas.

Children's Folklore Play and Folkgames

The study of play as part of folklore play and folkgames provides yet another mode through which play can and has been studied. These can be divided into two kinds of study: 1) folklore, and 2) historical/collection studies of play and games, and will be reviewed using these two divisions.

Children's Folklore Play and Folkgames -- Folklore and Folkgames

Two of the more specific studies on folklore were done by Abrahams (1962) and Gilmore (1983). Abrahams studied the folkgame, "playing the dozens", which is played by Black American boys. Although this is very old study which uses psychoanalysis to help explain the play, it still gives a very thorough description of the boys' folkplay. This is essentially a verbal play competition between boys which used such "linguistic (or paralinguistic) elements as changes in pitch, stress, and sometimes syntax, provide the signals of (a) contest" (1962, p. 211). Abrahams believed that the "most prominent linguistic features were (1) the reliance upon formulaic patterns, (2) the use of rhyme within these patterns, and (3) the change of speech rhythms from natural ones to ones that conform to the demands of the formula" (1962, p. 211).

The other important study of folklore by Gilmore (1983) looked at the stepping games of Black American girls. These, again, are verbal games but the stepping aspect has a very large physical component and is done in conjunction with the verbal rhymes. Gilmore considered stepping to be a "distinctive genre of black street rhyme, as a literacy-related speech event and as a social statement made by its performers" (1983, p. 235). Although Gilmore emphasized the literacy aspect of this play, this still represents an example of a folkgame.

A third and final study on folkgames and playground folklore is a thesis done by Hewes (1981). She discussed play, specifically verbal play, as a form of communication. Hewes has done a thorough recording and analysis of

playground lore including circle-game songs, skipping songs, ball-bouncing songs, hand-clapping songs, counting-out rhymes and taunting chants. She concluded that play was the child's own form of communication.

Children's Folklore Play and Folkgames -- Historical/Collection Studies

The historical/collection aspect of children's play and games is vast and has a past, itself. Sutton-Smith has been very instrumental in the organization and writing of many of these pieces. One particular series, *Studies In Play and Games*, is a compilation of many old studies on play. Two of these, A Children's Games Anthology: Studies in Folklore and Anthropology and The Games of the Americas, Parts I and II, have been edited by Sutton-Smith, while the third, Children's Games and Rhymes, was edited by Paul Brewster. As mentioned, they are compilations of old games and play which have been gathered together in one collection, and have particular historical significance.

Another of these collections is based on historical work done by Sutton-Smith (1981) on the play of New Zealand children. In this book, Sutton-Smith took a look at changes in play, and more specifically playground play, between 1840 and 1950. Sutton-Smith used an ethnographic historical method in his description of these games and the changes in them. Because it is taken from his original research on children's playground play, it also concluded with the same basic assumption that children's self-organized play has decreased over time, because adults have come to control this play. However, he concurred that perhaps this observed change is only a *change* and not a decrease, and was a result of the researchers inability to observe the new kinds of games and play, because of the inaccessibility of the locations where children play.

Dargan & Zeitlin's (1990) collection is another in the overview of historical/collection works. This research concentrates on children's play which occurs in the city, and only in the city. Dargan & Zeitlin organize this book into

four main areas: play in the urban environment; incorporation; transformation; and control. This book emphasizes just how pervasive play is and how it can and *will* occur in any environment, even the city where the entire structure seems to work against it.

The last historical study of children's play to be examined is one done by Mergen (1991), in which ninety-five years of historical change in the game preferences of American children were examined. In his study, Mergen offers the results of a "survey of 52 students, ages 14-17, attending a public high school in Washington, DC, and compares it with earlier surveys" (1991, p. 272). Mergen was not surprised by the dominance of TV[46] as a play activity, but was surprised that TV viewing was considered to be a social activity rather than a solitary one. "That is, teenagers of both sexes watched TV listened to music, and played video games as much with friends as by themselves. That talk, whether face-to-face or by telephone, was a preferred activity both indoors and out" (1991, p. 277). Mergen also makes particular note of outdoor play, where he observes that . . .

> the outdoor lists of favorite activities were both longer and less dominated by one kind of play indicates . . . that teenagers are able to express themselves more freely away from home and, thus, prefer to be 'outdoors'. Although they preferred outdoor activities of both sexes were simple, spontaneous, and difficult to label -- walking, exploring, talking, hanging out, doing nothing -- they were expressive behaviors. (1991, p. 280)

In summary, it can be said that folklore and outdoor play are other ways of studying the play of children in an out-of-doors setting. Most of this research has

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[46]Mergen, additionally notes that the students who responded to the questionnaire seemed "to offered their replies in a spirit of play. . . . The responses give a good feeling for the creativity and vitality of the present generation of youth. They are probably no more addicted to TV than are their parents, and they seem to take advantage of their material prosperity to enjoy themselves. Their memories seem to be excellent" (1991, p. 283).

concentrated on the recording of the play, itself, while not having much discussion or any interpretation of that play.

The Psychological Study of Play

Besides the anthropological study of play, psychologists have probably spent more time analyzing children's play than researchers in any other discipline. Although my study is one based in anthropology, a brief glance at some of the important psychological studies is important. These psychological/developmental studies have often led the way for later research and research in other disciplines, including anthropology.

For the purposes of this literature review, only those psychological studies which are either historically important or directly related to my study will be discussed. I have chosen to divide these studies into two kinds: 1) classification/developmental studies, and 2) comparative studies.

Classification /Developmental Studies

In assessing the classification studies, it is interesting to note that there have really been only two original studies done[47]. Many researchers have used these studies for their later research. The first of these was Parten's in the late 1920s, and the second was Smilansky's in the 1960s and done in an effort to assist play-tutoring of disadvantaged children.

As mentioned, the first of these studies, done by Parten in 1933, is the oldest and probably the most cited research in the area of children's play. Parten realized that children's success in school was linked to their social participation,

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[47]Although Jean Piaget has carried out a lot of research using children's play, I have not included him in this literature review because his emphasis on children's play is significantly different. Piaget in his studies used children's play to develop *individual* levels of development rather than assessment of whole group play. In other words, his emphasis was on categories of cognitive development not on the play itself.

and therefore in her study looked at the social participation of pre-school children. Parten's study gathered data in a nursery school, using observations during the free play period. Parten used two aspects of social participation, extensity (the number of social contacts made by an individual) and intensity (the kind of groups participated in and the role of the individual in those groups), to delineate six categories: unoccupied behavior, solitary play, onlooker behavior, parallel play associative play, and cooperative or organized supplementary play (1933, pp. 248-9). Parten then correlated each of these categories to IQ, sex/gender differences, and age. In her final analysis, Parten looked at changes in social participation, and found that continued attendance increased the children's social participation. In addition, she found that social participation "was dependent, to a large extent, upon the age of the children, (and) that there was a slight relationship between Intelligence Quotients and the degree of social participation" (1933, p. 268).

In her work, Smilansky (1968) looked at the school failure of children from the lower economic strata and the non-dominant culture. She found that this failure caused further learning and initiative problems for these children. This particular study was based on Smilansky's prior research, done in Israel with immigrant children from the Middle East and Northern African countries. In her research, Smilansky used the four general descriptions of play development (functional, constructive, dramatic, and games-with-rules) to ground her work. She believed that it was through the stage of dramatic play, and specifically the socio-dramatic aspect of this stage, that she could assist her students in successful participation in the elementary school classroom. In order to tutor the children in this type of play, Smilansky further developed a classification of socio-dramatic play which consisted of five categories: role playing, make-believe transformations (for objects, actions, and situations), social interaction, verbal

communication, and persistence (1968, p. 98). Using these categories, in a table format, she believed it was possible to identify the disadvantaged children. In the next part of her research, play-tutoring was carried out on these children. Smilansky concluded with the following results: 1) sixty-seven hours was not enough to undo "the cultural deprivation of these children (which) has accumulated over several years" (1968, p. 125); 2) the play experiences were not reinforced at home and therefore were not retained; 3) "the immediate environment of these children supplies them with impression and experiences meaningful and comprehensible to them, but that meaningful and comprehensible experiences are not the *main* prerequisite, decisive for the sociodramatic play of kindergarten children" (1968, p. 126); and 4) "some other factor is needed in addition to meaningful impressions and experiences" (1968, p. 126).

Comparative Studies

The psychological comparative studies of children's play are numerous, and range from studies done in the 1930s to current studies. Comparison is common technique within psychology[48] used to deduce differences between various groups, frequently using culture or social class as a basis for this comparison. This review will organize these studies into those which are historically significant to the study of children's play, and those which deal specifically with the outdoor play of children.

Comparative Studies -- Historically Significant Studies

These studies consistently compare either the play of children of two different cultures, or the play of children who come from different socio-economic strata, or both. The studies which focus on the comparison of cultures will be discussed first.

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[48]But this is not limited to psychology alone, as mentioned. Sociology is another discipline which often uses comparison on which to base their studies.

Seagoe & Murakami (1961) compared children's play with regard to age, sex, and rural-urban patterns in Japanese and American cultures, by interviewing first and sixth graders. They found that "intra-cultural difference exceeds the cross-cultural difference" (1961, p. 129), although they did find some differences in the area of team sports (which were stressed in American society).

Eifermann (1971) compared the developmental and sociocultural trends in the play activities of Jewish and Arab children in Israel. She tried to describe play activities which were universal and those which were culture-dependent. Eifermann found that, contrary to Piaget's claim that games with rules increase with age, games with rules decreased with age; contrary to Smilansky's claim that "culturally deprived" children do not have the ability to engage in symbolic play, between the ages of six to eight these children engaged in social symbolic play to a greater extent than did the other children, and she also found that "Roberts and Sutton-Smith's 'conflict' interpretation of game involvement, which leads to the prediction that rural children should engage in competitive play to a greater than do urban children, was not confirmed" (1971, p. 296); and finally that her results concurred with Eisenstadt's "theory" (of the perpetuation of homogeneous groups) where a "higher percentage of children will play in age-homogeneous groups in urban than in rural schools" (1971, p. 296).

Farver & Howes (1988) compared the play of American and Indonesian children, by trying to "understand how environmental circumstances might affect children's social behavior" (1988, p. 204). They found that while "Indonesian children were more likely to interact in mixed-age play groups, children in both cultures tended to interact in same-sex play groups. These findings suggest that the variation in children's social interactions are shaped by the social context" (1988, p. 212). Additionally, Farver & Howes found that "more positive affect

and social play was found in same-age play groups in both cultures, while more structurally complex play was found in mixed-age play groups" (1988, p. 213).

On the other hand, Tizard, Philps, & Plewis (1976), Fein & Stork(1981), and Prosser, Hutt, Hutt, Mahindadasa, & Goonetilleke (1986) have all compared the play of preschool children with regard to social class, where Udwin & Shmukler (1981) have compared children's preschool play using both social class and culture. Although Tizard et al. (1976) did find some differences with regard to the children's play (in British nursery schools) especially when the orientation of the preschool was taken into account (i.e. whether it was traditional or non-traditional), but their most important findings are in relation to outdoor play. They found that "working-class children were more than twice as likely as middle-class children to play outside . . . whilst middle-class children more often than working-class children chose paints and pattern-making" (1976, p. 272). They also found that there was more cooperative play outdoors, and that working-class children preferred to play outdoors, and showed greater maturity in their play in this outdoor setting.

Fein & Stork (1981) in their observations in a traditional nursery school (in an American YWCA day care center) attempted to look at the play situations (rather than specific children) and examined the components of sociodramatic play. They found that middle class children showed higher levels of play than did lower class children, however the differences were modest. They felt that this difference may have been do to the fact that

> there may be fewer settings in which lower class children exhibit their best performance, and when behavioral frequencies are summed over situations, the results may indicate that middle class children typically pretend more than lower class children. If so, one might conclude that lower class

> children have fewer opportunities to perform behavior that they are quite capable of performing. Therefore, the problem becomes one of opportunity rather than competence. (1981, p. 275)

Prosser et al. (1986) in their study compared the play of Sri Lankan children of different social classes using a British recording tool. They found that the availability of toys did not inhibit the use of non-toy materials, and also found that the poorer parents were less likely to intervene in children's play or to monitor their behavior. "Although this might indicate less interest, (it was probable) that these parents had less free time" (1986, p. 185). In addition, they found that symbolic play was more characteristic of upper class children, and that the lower class children engaged in more physical activities.

Udwin & Shmukler (1981) observed the play of both white and black African children in nursery schools. They found that socioeconomic class was the overriding variable in determining the levels of imaginative play that were found among the children.

Comparative Studies --- Outdoor Settings

Outdoor comparison studies are not that common in the psychological study of children's play, although as previously mentioned Tizard et al. (1976) did make specific comments about children's outdoor play. However, Johnson (1935) specifically compared the activities of the same children on the same playground before and after a change occurred in the play equipment. She found that children were very resourceful in all situations, on meagerly as well as on generously equipped playgrounds. She also found that bodily exercise and play materials ranked high in number on all playgrounds, and although she found that a greater amount of equipment decreased undesired behavior and it also greatly interfered with social development.

Henniger (1980) and Beth-Halachmy (1980) also compared children's play, specifically the outdoor play of children. Henniger (1980) in his study looked at both indoor and outdoor play, and compared these two settings using Smilansky's cognitive play categories. He found that outdoor play had received far less attention than had indoor play, and in addition he found outdoor play had many benefits for the children and "given the right equipment and careful teacher planning and encouragement, any desired play type could be stimulated in the outdoor environment" (1980, p. 114). In fact, he found that nearly all types of functional play occurred in the outdoor setting. Essentially Henniger (1980) said that indoor settings have, for too long, been the preferred play environment, and that it was time that the outdoors be utilized much more advantageously.

Beth-Halachmy (1980) in her study looked at how sex and age differences affected children's outdoor play during recess time. She concluded that "sex differences in children's play behavior during free-play periods appear(ed) primarily in the intermediate grades" (1980, p. 141), and up until that age the children usually played in homogeneous groups.

Christie & Johnsen (1987) have summarized a number of other studies, and make note of those which have a particular comment on outdoor play. They found that indoor and outdoor settings

> appear to affect the type of play in which children engage. Roper & Hinde and Smith & Connolly (as cited in Christie & Johnsen, 1987) both report that preschoolers engage in more gross motor play outdoors than indoors[49]. Neither study found any differences in the social quality of children's play across the two settings. (1987, p. 120)

Christie & Johnsen, in their review of play literature, also looked at gender and age differences in children's play and found that "in terms of preference, boys and

[49]Considering the amount of physical space available in the two different settings, I don't find this to be a particularly surprising finding.

older children have been found to spend more time playing outdoors than girls and younger children" (1987, p. 120).

As can be seen, the psychological study of play has been extensive, and that literature reviewed here touches only a little of the work done. This overview has concentrated on classification/developmental studies and comparative studies which have been done in the field of psychology.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the related literature and research which have studied children's play. This review has concentrated specifically on those areas of research which are related to my thesis topic, children's self-organized play.

The first section of this review concentrated on the anthropological study of children's play, because of the direct connection to my own topic. In this section, I focused on both the ethnographic study of children's play, and the same study as carried out by cognitive anthropologists.

Because the children which I have observed played in an outdoor setting, the second section of this review dealt with folklore and outdoor games. This discussion was divided into the following sections: classification studies, playground play studies, and folkgame studies.

The last section was a review of some of the psychological studies of children's play. Many of these studies have led the research in children's play, and are therefore important. This section dealt with both classification/ developmental studies and comparative studies of children's play.

Chapter Four

ANALYSIS OF DATA AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter will concentrate on the analysis and discussion of my observations of children's self-organized play at Sunshine Park and Playground. The first part will be a detailed description of the playground and park in which I carried out my observations. Following this, I will describe how my observations were carried out. The last part will give a portraiture of the children who I observed during my visits to Sunshine Park and Playground.

The second section of this chapter will concentrate on the results which I have developed from my data. These include discoveries in regards to age and gender within play groups, type of play observed, and the nature of the play recorded.

Discussion, Explanation, and Outline of Observations

In the discussion of any research project, it is imperative to have a full discussion about the setting, individuals, and research methodology involved. This is especially important for research which uses a qualitative methodology, and for ethnographically-oriented research such as this project. For this reason, I will spend the first part of this chapter discussing and outlining the conditions under which my observations at Sunshine Park and Playground took place.

The Research Setting

Sunshine Park and Playground is located in a major western Canadian city in the inner city area. The park and its playground is approximately one city block (See: Appendix II - Maps A and B). One side of the park and playground parallels an important and busy street, while the other three sides are bordered by residential streets. Three of the sides of the park are enclosed by six foot high chain-link fence. The fourth side, to the north, is bordered by a municipal building and day care which extends over most of that side. There is an open area on the north east side along a parking lot. Also located within the park is an equipment shed (Appendix III - photo #1), mid-way along the western most edge, which would be used by playground supervisors in the summer for organized activities. As pointed out, also located alongside the boundary of the park is the municipal building (Appendix III - photo #2). This borders the north-west corner, and houses a day care with its separate outdoor playground and equipment (and is separated from the rest of the playground by another fence).

The park itself has many large trees in it (Appendix III - photo #3 & #4) and a line of many large trees which runs from the north-east corner southwards to half way along the east side of the park. Most of the park ground is covered with grass, and it is well-maintained by the city; in fact some areas are so well-

kept that Bocce, an Italian game of lawn bowling (Appendix III - photo #2), is played here. A soccer field (Appendix III - photo #4) is in the north end along the east side of the park.

The playground (Appendix III - photo #5) is located in a central location in the park but slightly closer to the west boundary. The playground actually consists of two (more or less separate) play areas with a concrete sidewalk dividing the two (Appendix III - photo #6). A border of large logs (Appendix III - photo #7) separates the playgrounds from the surrounding grass or concrete areas. The more southern playground (Appendix III - photo #1) consists of a small slide, a swing set with four bucket-type swings, and a geodesic dome-shaped climber. These structures are of metal construction and appear to be approximately twenty-five to thirty years old. The more northerly playground is about three times the size of the other playground, and appears to be newer (and likely remodeled). It consists of three pieces of equipment which are of the same era as those in the smaller playground: a large swing set with four rubber-seated swings (Appendix III - photo #8), monkey bars (Appendix III - photo #9), and a large slide (Appendix III - photo #10). In addition, there are other newer pieces of playground equipment which seem to have been added in the last ten years. These consist of a tire swing set (Appendix III - photo #11) with four large tires, a wooden bridge and platform apparatus (Appendix III- photo #10) which has been attached to the large metal slide, a wooden balance beam, three (red, blue, and yellow) large concrete tubes, a climber made out of tires and wooden logs, and a log climber, which resembles a log house, (Appendix III - photo #9 & #12). There are four wooden benches[50] in this area, and they both face the larger

[50]It is important to comment on the park bench itself. The location and number, only four, are surprising considering that this a large park and playground. Smith (1989) comments on the bench itself wherein it "signifies a certain relation of the adult to the child. The bench is a place for sitting down and taking a relaxed view of what the child is doing. The well-placed bench is meant to give the adult a sense of security, not only about the safety of the child, but also in regard to the way in which one feels comfortable as an adult in a place that is ostensibly for children" (p. 50).

playground -- one at the north-east corner, one at the south border, and one at the north west corner, and the fourth is near the equipment shed and faces the small playground (Appendix II - Map B).

Immediately south of the playgrounds is a concrete wading pool (Appendix III - photo #4). Although I have never seen the pool with water, other wading pools in the city are filled during programmed summer activities. On the east side of the wading pool is a park bench. Around the wading pool and between it and the playground, is a concrete sidewalk (Appendix III - photo #4 & #1) which actually begins at the south-west corner of the park and leads to the playground area. In addition, there is one picnic table near the south-west entrance and another just north of the equipment shed.

The park and playground, as mentioned, are located in an inner-city area. The neighborhood is well-maintained and the houses in the area are all in good repair. The residents in the area are mostly New Canadians (of south European and Asian background), and Native Canadians, although a few Euro-Canadians also live in the neighborhood. Across the main street, to the west of the park and also to the south, are a number of ethnic shops and restaurants.

Three additional observations should be mentioned. Firstly, as with other community parks and playgrounds, there is no bathroom[51] present. Secondly, there is only one garbage can in the park, near the sidewalk on the south west corner of the park. Lastly, neighborhood access to the park is fairly limited. Along the three completely fenced sides, there is only one opening per side. On the north side of the park, which is bordered by the municipal building, there is access through the parking lot.

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[51]As a parent, I continually find that this characteristic of playgrounds is amazing, considering the clientele which *use* the playgrounds, children.

Observation Techniques

As outlined in Chapter Two my observation of children's play has been based in ethnographic methodology, specifically participant observation. In order to not come across as a controlling adult I minimized my participation with the children so that my presence would not interfere with or change their play. In addition, this indirect involvement was carried out so that I was able to observe activities that were controlled entirely by the children.

The observations at Sunshine Park and Playground were conducted over six separate visits, totaling 326 minutes of observations over a duration of eighteen months. Observations were usually carried out with both my husband, Roger, and my son, Kristopher, although some of the observations were carried out by myself and some with only Kristopher. All of the observations were done on the weekend except one which was carried out on a Tuesday, and was done during the week in order to see what play groups were present on week days. (None were present.) The weather during my visits to the playground varied from warm and sunny to cool and windy, however the observations which gave the longest and richest recordings of the play were those which occurred on warm, sunny days.

While conducting the observations, although I interacted 'as a parent on the playground', I tried to minimize my interaction with the children. I was "more an observer of their activities than a participant observer" (Goodwin, 1990, p. 23). This particular focus was taken because I was more concerned with the children's own organization of their play and activities than with "accounts of their activities to an outsider" (Goodwin, 1990, p. 23).

In recording my observations of the children's play I used anecdotal records and field notes. I had carried out other observations of children's play where I had attempted to use charts and recording tables, but found that these

were not suitable for ethnographic methodology, and additionally, they gave very little of the *rich* description which I wanted for my study.

Upon entering the playground, I would make note of the weather conditions, time, date, and anything that might affect the children's play. In observing the children's play, I did not focus on the children individually, but on their play as a whole (Finnan, 1982). In conducting my observations, I attempted to write down as much information as possible during my visits, and transcribed my field notes as soon as possible upon my return home. I also used maps and photos I had taken of the playground to help me remember details and situate particular activities which had taken place.

In positioning myself while observing the children's play, I usually sat on either the bench between the two playgrounds or on the bench on the north east corner of the large playground. However, observations were not done exclusively while seated, and much of the children's play was viewed as I played or walked around the playground with Kristopher. Because this was not a playground in Kristopher's neighborhood, and because of his age (three to four and a half years), he frequently asked for an adult play companion. While moving around the playground I also had a greater opportunity to hear what was being said between the children and also for limited interaction with the children.

The Children of Sunshine Park and Playground

One of the most interesting things about observing the play of children in a community playground is the mixture of children who come there. Because this is an inner-city area, these children have few other play spaces except a playground such as this. There are, for example, no ravines or wooded areas nearby where these children might go to play.

As already mentioned, this area of the city, like most Canadian cities, has a multi-cultural mix of people. The composition of children who play at Sunshine Park and Playground are merely a reflection of the cultural mix of the community. The park serves a diverse range of children, and this includes many who are members of visible minorities (Natives, Orientals, Asians, and Afro-Canadians). In fact, in a simple tally of hypothesized ethnicity, there were about twice the number of visible minority children in the playground during my visits, than those thought to be Euro-Canadian.

The children who play in this playground were also different in age. Often the children playing in the playground would vary in age as much as ten or twelve years, from the youngest to the oldest child. Most were about[52] seven years of age.

It can be seen then that Sunshine Park and Playground is a typical, large, inner-city park. It serves the community by providing a variety of facilities. The most widely used area and focus of my study is the children's playground, at the center of the park. This playground allows a variety of play to occur as organized by the children themselves. A variety of children, both ethnically and in regard to age, come to this playground to play and socialize with each other. I have used participant observations to gather data on the self-organized play of these children during the time I have observed them in Sunshine Playground.

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[52]This average age can only be estimated because no specifics were ever asked of the children for two reasons. Firstly, because I did not want to interfere in the children's play, I did not ask the children specific questions unless it came up while I was playing with Kristopher. Secondly, ethically because I was observing these children as a participant in a public setting I did not have permission from the children's parents to interview the children.

Research Results

In reflecting on the observations of children's self-organized play at Sunshine Park and Playground, a number of things can be noted. Firstly, as mentioned in the previous description, the ages of the children in the playground differed. Specifically, the children of different ages played *together* in groupings, which I will call multi-age groupings. Secondly, I found that contrary to much of the play which takes place in school-type settings, the play of the children at Sunshine Park and Playground occurred across gender-lines. Boys and girls frequently played *together*. Thirdly, the outdoor play of these children was diverse, complex, and flexible in nature. This was especially apparent in the children's unique and self-developed game of 'swing tag'. Lastly, I will discuss the predominantly cooperative play which was present at Sunshine Park and Playground.

Multi-Aged Play

During my observations, I observed much play where children played in groups where their ages differed more than one or two years (as is seen in day care and nursery school play). These multi-age play situations appeared to take two forms which differ from each other. The first type of multi-age play was essentially a baby-sitting situation, where an older child was responsible for the care of younger children, and simply brought them to the playground to play. In this case, the older children which I saw, in a care-giving role, were between approximately nine to fourteen years of age. Sometimes they were responsible for the care of the younger children by themselves, and sometimes they were one of several in charge of caring for younger children. The children in their care also varied in number and age, from only a couple of children to as many five children, and as young as under one year to about three years of age. For example, during

one of my visits I observed a girl, Josie, who was about nine years old and was in charge of a group of five young children. She brought all the children to the park either by walking with them, carrying or pulling them on a wagon, to the tire swing set area (See Appendix II - Map B), and proceeded to get all the children settled in or on one of the tires. This included placing the youngest, Jeffery who was less than one year, inside the tire and pushing him back and forth. She also had to position the three-year-old (Ben) and the four-year-old (Jamie) on top of the swings so that they would not fall, while at the same time watching baby Jeffery, and pushing them all.

The second type of multi-age play which I observed at Sunshine Park and Playground was one in which the children played together on a more-or-less equal basis, in a group where their ages differed by more than one or two years. It must be noted, at this point, that although these two styles of multi-age play do differ, one can see that the styles evolved out of each other, and I often saw both types of multi-age play in the same group of children simultaneously. Although the very young children (under two years of age) which were being baby-sat did not participate in much play with the older children, I did observe complex play (games with rules[53]) involving children as young as three years playing on an equal level in a group with children as old as ten or eleven. Examples of this type of play were seen during my visits to Sunshine Park and Playground, and these included playing with Dinky toys on the large slide, digging in the sand, playing tag, and playing on the playground equipment (SEE APPENDIX IV for a more complete description of the other games at Sunshine Park and Playground).

The presence of multi-age play is somewhat unique in the study of children's play, but is substantiated by other similar studies. Goodwin (1990) in

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[53]A more thorough description of the 'swing tag' game, which was very popular at Sunshine Park and Playground, will be provided later in this chapter.

her study of Black American children's street play[54] also found multi-age play to occur frequently.

> The neighborhood, however, is perhaps the richest setting for their interaction; there is a range of different categories of children -- younger and older, girls and boys -- are copresent while they participate in a number of diverse activities (i.e. chores and babysitting) which intersect with play. (1990, p. 21)

This baby-sitting aspect of the multi-age play also agrees with my observations at Sunshine Park and Playground.

This multi-age play is much more often found in non-Western cultures. Goodwin also noticed this, and said that

> children in American schools generally play in same-age groups. Indeed, cross-cultural studies have argued that the North American school environment, the site most often picked for study of peers, with its characteristic large groups of same-age is atypical of peer groups world-wide. (1990, p. 21)

Schwartzman (1984; 1983) and Farver & Howes (1988) also agree with this observation. Schwartzman (1984) notes that for many non-Western cultures, particularly those where social groupings are small, multi-age play is a necessity. Schwartzman has referred to this type of multi-age play as child-structured play, which is "characterized by child-interaction (in peer or multi-aged groups), frequently, without the presence of an adult" (1983, p. 210). This appears to me to be much the same as the play which I observed at Sunshine Park and Playground. Adults were rarely present while the children played, although

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[54]It should be noted that Goodwin had much the same motivation in her study of street play as I did for my study of playground play. "In contrast to studies of peer interaction that focus on events within the school setting (a situation in which adults dominate), this study was situated within the children's neighborhood. Such a vernacular setting constitutes a key locus for the analysis of children's competencies. . . . Moreover, events are controlled and organized by the children themselves, rather than by adult caretakers" (Goodwin, 1990, pp. 283-4).

parents would wander through the park and playground to check on their children.

Farver & Howes (1988) found, in their review of the literature, that in "many cultures children's play groups are typically composed of mixed ages and sexes" (p. 205). They also found that baby-sitting was part and parcel of play activities, where "sibling or child caretaking, a common practice in most non-Western societies, serves to incorporate young children into mixed-age social groups very early in life" (1988, p. 205 citing Weisner and Weisner & Gallimore).

It can be seen then, that play is very much a social activity, and when organized by children, play can and does take place in multi-aged groups[55]. And my findings at Sunshine Park and Playground are but one example of this type of play.

Play Across Gender Lines

Besides being segregated by age, some play has been found, to be segregated by gender. However, this was *not* what I found during my observations at Sunshine Park and Playground. Along with multi-age play I found group play which included children of both sexes. In fact, I rarely saw play which separated children into play groups which were of one sex or the other. This was very evident in all of the children's play which I observed on the playground, but probably most noticeable in their 'swing tag' games. During the course of the 'swing tag' game, whoever arrived at the playground (and was a

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[55]Because I have not be able to interview these children (or obtain specific municipal statistics) to determine what the family size and composition might be, I can only guess that the children generally come from families where there is more than one child. In addition, because of the location of this playground, inner-city, one might surmise that many of these children come from families which have only one parent or where both parents are employed full-time and are away from home. As a result, the multi-age play (due to family size) and the baby-sitting component might be very common in this neighborhood.

regular there[56]) would be asked to join in. For example, during one observation the 'swing tag' game had been going on for about 45 minutes, with a mostly female group of children, when a small group of boys began to arrived at the large swing set. The main player (Susan) of the tag game firstly asked, "Want to play?" One of the boys who had arrived first simply replied, "Yep", and sat down on one of the swings. A couple more boys came closer to the swings, and Susan happily announced, "Everybody's here, now, 'cause everybody's starting to wake up". The boys then proceeded to fully participate in the game. The leader, Susan, was still the leader, and the game carried on much as it had, only with more participants.

As mentioned, this cross-gender play also was evident in other forms of play and playground activities. Sometimes the children would be digging holes in the sand together, and the group involved was exclusively (from my observations) always a mixture of boys and girls. Additionally, the children often rode around the playground on their bikes in groups of boys and girls. This was the same for playing on the equipment, playing regular tag, or most any other activity at the playground, no one appeared to be excluded because of their gender. I believe, in a similar way to the age-segregation issue, that if the children had to wait for enough of their own gender to make up a group that would all be interested in doing the same activity, they would never have enough children.

Once again, this research on cross-gender play contrasts with much of the research on children's play and most observations done in school situations[57].

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[56]This is particularly important point, because like any play between children, they usually join in when they are comfortable and know the other children involved. For example, after one of my last visits to the Sunshine Park and Playground, I asked Kristopher why he didn't really play with the other children and instead asked either Roger or I to play with him, he said it was because "the other kids don't know me". This fact may have a tremendous effect on the play of children in a school situation, especially at the beginning to the school year.

[57]This would also be in agreement with other formal and informal observations I have done of children's play in both play school and day care settings. In these cases I was amazed at the high propensity of segregation of play according to sex. Often the children rarely played outside their sex-segregated play groups.

However, this obviously contradicts my own and other researchers observations of children's self-organized play in outdoor's settings[58]. Goodwin (1990) notes that the gender separation (in schools) as influenced by both children's own preferences and teachers interference, far exceeds what she saw during her observations on 'Maple Street'. Goodwin goes on to comment that

> while studies of girls' peer groups fill a large void in our understanding of female social organization, most studies (among white, predominantly middle-class girls) tend to focus on distinctions between age/sex groups and boundary maintaining mechanisms, ignoring the features of social interaction girls and boys share in common. (1990, p. 285)

In addition, Farver & Howes (1988), as mentioned in the previous discussion on multi-age play, note that cross-culturally, the segregation of children during play according to sex does not typically occur.

Finnan (1982) in her analysis of children's chase games notes that "male and female roles are clearly marked in many traditional rule-governed games" (p. 369), and that many of these games are clearly labeled (by the children) to be 'girls' or 'boys'. However, in her study of self-structured chase games, Finnan ascertained that "boys' chase style is aggressive and physical and girls' style is passive and teasing" (1982, p. 369). But, she found that when boys and girls played together, "they combine(ed) the most powerful elements of their respective styles. The disorder and chaos created in large girl/boy self-structured chase games gave girls a rare opportunity to transcend the restraints traditionally inhibiting them in their play[59]" (1982, p. 369). Perhaps, this illustrates *some* of the

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[58]And perhaps the key phrase here is outdoor settings.

[59]Finnan believes that this style of play is vitally important to the children's learning. "Rather than assuming this aggressive, seemingly chaotic play is nonproductive, one can see it as the response of children preparing for a changing society. Games of disorder address the dialectic between the order created in society and the disorder associated with the environment and with new societal demands. These games do not equip children to be mommys or daddys or doctors and nurses, but help children cope with change and uncertainty in a nonstatic society" (1982, pp. 370-1).

barriers which can be overcome when children organize their own play and games.

In my observations, I found that the self-organized play of the children at Sunshine Park and Playground generally occurred in groups of boys and girls. The exclusion of children from play did not appear to take place because of gender.

Diverse, Complex, and Flexible Play

As mentioned, I discovered that the play of the children at Sunshine Park and Playground was especially rich and diverse, and this was particularly evident in the playing of their self-developed game of 'swing tag'. This game play also showed the flexibility which the children had with regard to their play/game.

Diverse, Complex, and Flexible Play -- The Description

In order to evaluate and more closely examine 'swing tag' as a game, I firstly need to describe the game, itself. The game of 'swing tag'[60] appears to be unique to the Sunshine Park and Playground. Although I have not visited every playground in this city, I have thus far not encountered the game of 'swing tag' anywhere else.

This game of 'swing tag' involved the large swing set (Appendix II - Map B and Appendix III - photo #6), with three distinct play positions and specific boundaries in the sand. The locus of control and the most desirable position, was that one I have named the 'taggee', wherein the children sat on the swings and were only safe if they were within the boundary of what the children called the "end-posts" (Appendix III - photo #13), and within that boundary, only if they were holding on to the end post or onto another child who was holding onto the end post. In addition, to the boundaries designated by the "end posts", there

[60]It must be noted that this is not the title or name which I have given the game but rather the name the children have used for the game.

were also imaginary lines on the sand over which the 'tagger' could not move when she/he was attempting to tag the 'taggee'. The game was begun or restarted by one of the children yelling "1, 2, 3, End Post". The strategy or aim of the game was to swing diagonally on the swings without getting caught. The second position was the 'tagger', and was the one who attempted to tag one of the children on the swings. The third position was one where the child or children sat out on the wooden edging (Appendix III - photo 7) waiting for their turn.

Now this game had several variations depending upon the children involved and their age and ability or their understanding of the strategy to be used. For instance, if the child who was the 'tagger' was one of the younger children then, the 'tagger' would likely use more running, in order to tag one of the children, but often was given more opportunities to do the tagging by the 'taggees'. Another variation which I frequently observed was one dependent on the number of children available to play the game. For example, if only three or four children were present and willing to play the game, then only two of the four swings would be used so that all the positions (or at least the 'taggee' and 'tagger' positions) would be filled. But if there were more than five or six children wanting to play the game, then all four of the swings would be used. In both these cases, when the numbers were at the low end, the waiting-out position was frequently not used or needed. And generally, despite the number of 'taggees' playing, there was only one 'tagger', however this was not absolute, as I did observe during one of my sessions, a second 'tagger' also present.

In addition, to this game of 'swing tag' (which I observed on several different occasions and played by entirely different groups of children), the children easily developed other games involving the swing set. Two of these were: 1) throwing the swing, itself, to see how many times you could wrap the swing chains around the top bar (Appendix III - photo 8), and 2) swinging as

high as possible and then jumping off the swing to see who could go the furthest (Appendix III - photo 14).

Diverse, Complex, and Flexible Play -- The Analysis

Using Avedon's (1971) structural elements of games, 'swing tag' can be seen to fit into many of the areas used to describe games. 'Swing tag' appears to contain or have: a purpose, procedures for action, rules governing action, a number of required players, roles of participant, participant interaction patterns, abilities and skills required for participation, necessary physical setting, and required equipment (Avedon, 1971, p. 422). However, as outlined by Goldstein (1971) and Hughes (1991) these elements are not absolute and a number of these game elements may vary or do not even exist. For example, the 'results or pay-off', as listed by Avedon (1971), do not really seem to be a part of this game. Also the 'purpose' of this game could be considered to be very vague, quite simply 'fun'. As noted by Goldstein (1971) the altering of rules can occur and certainly does in 'swing tag'. Often accommodations are made for younger or inexperienced children so that they may have a fairer chance at the game.

Hughes (1991) in her analysis of gaming and its interplay with the social life of the children points out a couple of important considerations. Firstly, the gaming rules or what Hughes (1991) calls 'rules for rules' are as important, if not more so, than the so-called obvious rules. As indicated in Chapter Two, these 'rules for rules' deal with "when and how the rules of the game ought to be applied, ignored, or modified" (Hughes, 1991, p. 287). An excellent example of this occurred at Sunshine Playground. During a visit, one of the girls who was a leader of the 'swing tag' game, had left the playground for a few minutes. Before going she told the other children that she would be back. However, when she returned the children did not give her seat back to her as they believed that she had left for good. Even after some protest, by the girl, the group remained firm in

their decision. In this case the rules were strictly applied, and from my interpretation it was because she was a good player and the other children knew that she had had lots of time to play earlier and in addition because of her skill, she would soon have the opportunity to get back into the game (as a 'taggee' or 'tagger').

Secondly, Hughes (1991) points out that often activities which occur during a game, especially as seen through adult's or researcher's eyes, do not look like they are part of the play. "Players need to understand and manage transitions among activities that are defined primarily by the game and those that are not, and they need to integrate the flow of action across those boundaries in meaningful ways" (1991, p. 291). The above example, where the girl leaves the playground, certainly applies but another example from my observations probably describes this situation even better. During one of my earlier observation sessions, I watched a group of girls playing a serious game of 'swing tag'. However, about every fifteen minutes they would stop for a candy or gum break, and the game would completely dissolve for three or four minutes while the treat was distributed. As an observer, I could not understand this being part of the game, but on a social level as described by Hughes (1991), this was only *part* of the whole game.

As mentioned in Chapter Two, games can be analyzed in a variety of manners. Three forms of play and games have been distinguished by Denzin and "they range along a continuum of rule-embeddedness, or degree of structure and formality" (1975, p. 469). *Playing-at-play* describes the 'free-floating interactions' of the young child in play. *Playing-at-a-game* describes the play of a child (three-seven years) who understands that a game can be played, but not exactly *how* to play it. *Playing-a-game* describes the skilled game player who

plays within the rules of a specific game (Denzin, 1975). Denzin (1975) notes that prior typologies of games

> have confused these play forms (playing-at-play, playing-at-a-game, and playing-a-game) and in so doing they have failed to dissect the unique configurations of place and action that occur within each of them. They also prejudged and underestimated the interactional skills of the young child player of play and games. (1975, p. 469)

According to this analysis, the 'swing tag' game would likely fall in both the 'playing-at-a-game' and 'playing-a-game' categories. Because the game is played by a multi-aged group, the different children would probably fit into different spots on the continuum.

In a more general analysis, the 'swing tag' game can be seen to be highly complex. Generally this play might not be considered to be particularly significant except for the fact that the location where I carried out my observations was an inner-city playground. According to some theorists, the children of lower socio-economic classes such as this do not usually exhibit such types of play. However, it should be noted that this observation of complex play, is not unique and corresponds with Fein & Stork's [1981] findings from their studies carried out in day care settings with children from lower socio-economic backgrounds. In addition, this game of 'swing tag' appears to highlight the children's flexibility in their play. The many variations in the game aptly demonstrate this.

Cooperative Play

I observed the prevalence of cooperative play during my visits to Sunshine Park and Playground. The play which I observed during my visits was almost exclusively cooperative in nature. I can think of only one occasion during all my

visits where the play was slightly competitive in style, and this type of play lasted only a short time before the boys involved in it stopped because they were not getting any attention from the rest of the children. Although one might think of 'swing tag' as being a competitive game it was really anything but. Everyone was there to have fun and participate, not to compete with each other.

The presence of cooperative play concurs with other examples of children's self-organized play. Schwartzman (1983) says that child-structured play is "more likely to be egalitarian and cooperative in contrast to adult-structured play which tends to be more hierarchical and competitive" (p. 210). In addition, Hughes (citing Hymes and Goffman) found that even though games were being played, they were usually cooperative in nature.

> Games are prototypically competitive, but social life is prototypically cooperative. Cooperation, therefore, is taken as the more fundamental organizing principle in gaming episodes. Participants in face-to-face interaction must coordinate their actions to sustain the exchange and the projected definition of the situation upon which it is based, even though their expected roles, underlying purposes, and motives may be quite different. Simply put, a great deal of cooperation is necessary to sustain a competitive exchange. (1991, p. 294)

This observation of cooperative play also agrees with much of the cross-cultural research on children's self-organized play. In contrast to Western play, the play of children of many other cultures is generally cooperative and social. For example, Rosenstiel (1975) in her study of the Motu Of Papua New Guinea noted almost exclusively cooperative among the children. "The concept behind cooperative games is simple: People play with one another rather than against one another; they play to overcome challenges, not to overcome other people; and they are freed by the very structure of the games to enjoy the play

experience itself" (Orlick, 1982, p. 4). In fact, most of those studies note cooperation to be the norm -- again, simply because of low numbers. If the children were to play competitively, there would not be enough children to play or the competition would eliminate them. Hartup in Farver & Howes hypothesized that "symmetrical behaviors such as sociability and aggression occur most in the interaction of age-mates, whereas asymmetrical behaviors such as nurturance, instruction, and leadership are characteristic of mixed-age interaction" (1988, p. 206).

In my observations, I found that Sunshine playground, was usually the site of much play that was cooperative in nature. This appears to have occurred alongside or, perhaps because of, the multi-age mix of the children present on the playground.

Conclusion

This chapter has concentrated on an analysis of the data on children's self-organized play which was gathered during my visits to Sunshine Park and Playground. In order to give some understanding of the information that I gained during my visits, I initially discussed, in detail, the physical features of the playground, the precise observation techniques, and description of the children which I observed.

The second part of the chapter focused on the findings which I had made with regard to my data. Four findings, about children's self-organized play, were made during my visits to Sunshine Park and Playground. These included: the predominance of multi-aged and cross-gender play; the presence of complex, diverse, and flexible play; and the cooperative nature of almost all the play at the playground.

Chapter Five

GENERAL DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

This chapter will conclude my study of children's self-organized play. In this chapter, I will briefly review the importance of play and why its study is necessary. I will also summarize why ethnography is so useful for the study of children's play. The limitations and implications of this study will then be discussed. Following this, I will take a look at any new or other important literature that has a bearing on this study of children's play. This chapter will conclude with a discussion about the future directions which the study of children's self-organized play might take.

The Importance of Studying Children's Play

As outlined in Chapter Two, there are a number of purposes or reasons for studying children's play. One of the most important reasons is to ascertain how and what play does for the child. By most researchers' standards, play appears to be the ideal learning mechanism for a child. Play teaches the child, about his/her world, through all the senses. Denzin maintains that

> when players enter the pretense world of play, they enter a world that allows them to become what they will become in everyday 'real' life: differentially skilled participants in the business of face-to-face interaction. By learning to play, young children learn what elements make up place. They learn to attach different meanings and interpretations to self, other, and object; and to take the point of view of civil-legal, polite-ceremonial, and relationally-specific rules. They learn how to form, break, and challenge social relationships; how to measure time and its passage; and how to assume (or avoid) the biographical consequences of any set of action. . . . In this sense, play as an autotelic interaction form transcends itself for play becomes life and life becomes play. (1975, p. 474)

Amonashvili (1987) and other researchers maintain that the free choice of an activity is one of the defining characteristics of play, and it is this free choice which brings pleasure and joy to the child. An activity "that develops on the basis of such experience transforms all the forces in the child that are needed to carry it out and enables them to operate fully and freely" (Amonashvili, 1987, p. 87). Play appears, then, to assist the child in learning through every mode possible.

Additionally, play allows the child to excel in all areas of growth and development: physical, mental, emotional, and social. Herzog (1984), in his study of primates and foraging societies, summarizes this purpose and critical function

of play "as perhaps the major channel through which juveniles acquire information about their physical environment, familiarize themselves with the social structure and conventions of their group, and test and improve their motor skills" (p. 72). In essence, play aids the child in learning everything, all around him/herself.

Because play helps the child learn in such a holistic manner, one can see that the child's culture would also be learned through play. In fact, play is one of the main mechanisms through which children learn their culture. Orlick points out that play "is an ideal medium for positive social learning because it is natural, active, and highly motivating for most children" (1982, p. 6). Play assists the child in learning his/her culture and, in turn, the culture determines what play the child will learn, in other words play and culture mutually reinforce each other. It is, in fact, the child's family which is the "essential mediating link between the transmission of culture and emergent patterns of play" (Slaughter and Dombrowski, 1989, p. 304). For researchers of play, the investigation of play is often the underlying method for discovering culture, either the child's own ethnic culture or the culture of children[61].

As noted, play can serve a multitude of functions for the child. But often as adults, we do not see the true value of play. However, Smith points out that "because of our constantly changing world, it may be necessary to equip our children with generalized and innovative skills rather than specific ones. In fact, these can be met by emphasizing the benefits of play for innovative learning, this being, as it were, a 'residual benefit' of play that is most resistant to replacement" (1982, p. 153). And because of the holistic form in which play is learned, and in addition the holistic manner in which play allows the child to learn, is an ideal

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[61]Unfortunately, in our very adult-centered manner we have rarely even made note of this.

medium for preparing a child for life in his culture (no matter the complexity of that culture).

Using Ethnography to Study Children's Play

Because play is so closely connected with culture, it seems only natural that the study of play should use the major research method for studying culture -- ethnography. However, in the past this has not been the case. Much of past research has used developmental psychology and its quantitative research methods to study play. Therefore, the use of anthropology and its research techniques has been a relatively new endeavor for the study of play. It is because play is involved in holistic learning, that a research method which recognizes its holistic character is absolutely necessary. For this reason, it can be seen that ethnography is tailor-made for the study of children's play. Goetz & LeCompte (1984) outline some of characteristics of ethnographic research which so aptly apply to the study of children's play. First, "ethnographic research strategies are empirical and naturalistic. Participant and nonparticipant observation are used to acquire first hand, sensory accounts of phenomena as they occur in real-world settings, and investigators take care to avoid purposive manipulation of variables in the study" (1984, p. 3). In addition, "ethnographic research is holistic. Ethnographers seek to construct descriptions of total phenomena within their various contexts" (1984, p. 3). And last, "ethnography is multimodal or eclectic; ethnographic researchers use a variety of research techniques to amass their data" (1984, p. 3). As can be seen by the above, the use of ethnography as a research method, is *ideal* for the study of children's play.

The location of my research (out-of-doors) also determined that ethnography would be most advantageous to the study of children's play.

> Ethnographic researchers typically study phenomena as they occur naturally rather than as they may be manipulated or arranged in advance under conditions often controlled by the investigator. . . . The naturalistic setting within which ethnography normally is conducted both facilitates on-the-spot analysis of causes and processes and precludes precise control of so-called extraneous factors. (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984, p. 10)

In addition, to the advantages already mentioned, ethnography helps avoid some other problems which have been encountered in the study of children's play. As Slaughter and Dombrowski note, "the play of American cultural minority children tends to be studied only from the perspective of the interests of researchers identified solely with the American majority culture" (1989, p. 303). This can affect the outcome of the research in two ways. Firstly, this can result in ethnocentric assumptions about the minority culture's (children's) play. Secondly, this can result in adult-centered conclusions, wherein the children's own culture is not considered. The use of ethnography in researching children's play can *help* to overcome these difficulties and problems, whereby, ethnographers

> attempt to enter unfamiliar settings without generalizing from their own experiences to the new setting and to enter familiar settings as if they were totally unknown. This suspension of preconceptions permits ethnographers to focus on participant constructs -- subjective or objective -- and sensitizes researchers to their own subjective responses. (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984, p. 10)

Which is not to say that ethnographic researchers do not come to their research with biases. On the contrary, ethnographers like all researchers, have biases, the difference being that ethnographic researchers try to become critically self-aware of these biases and how their biases might affect their research. Additionally, the

researcher must make her audience fully aware of what biases may touch her research and findings.

It can be seen, then, that ethnographic methods work well for the research of children's play. Ethnography is an exemplar research method because its emphasis allows the play to be defined by the children rather than the Western researchers.

Limitations of the Study

As stringent as any research might be in the application of a research method, there can still be difficulties either in the practice of the method or problems in the gathering of data while using the technique. Despite the strict adherence to the ethnographic method, this study too has had its limitations. Although a number of significant types of play were found in Sunshine Park and Playground, as noted in Chapter Four, including both multi-aged and cross-gender play, play which was diverse and complex, and play which was dominantly cooperative, limitations were still found while conducting the observations and in the analysis of the data.

The first limitation actually involves two problem areas: ethnography as a methodology and the chosen setting, a community playground. Because this research project used ethnographic methods, this meant that when gathering data, as a researcher, I had to wait for the play sessions to unfold at the playground. As noted, this is part of the ethnographic method, however, this contrasts other work that had been done in institutional surroundings where children are present in playful groups much of the time and as a result researchers are able to gather data at almost any moment. As a result, I did not have a large number of hours of data collection which one might associate with such a research project, and as a

consequence this project might not be considered to be a 'true' ethnographic study because of the small number of hours of field work. In spite of this, the data which I did gather was highly complex and very rich.

The second limitation comes as part of the ethnographic method which I used. That is, the children of Sunshine Park and Playground are by no means representative of all community play groups. "Like every social institution it is shaped by the historic, economic, and social conditions within which it is embedded" (Goodwin, 1990, p. 20). In other words, as an ethnographer I cannot make any assumptions about the children and their community. Because I do not know the history of and about Sunshine Park and Playground, I must only record what I have seen during my observation sessions.

The last limitation of this study deals with the use of games to evaluate children's social life. Goldstein in his study of 'counting out' warns that

> if games serve as mechanisms through which children are prepared for adult roles in life, as some social psychologists maintain, then identifying a game as one of chance when it, in fact, is one of strategy may complicate any attempt at relating the end result of a socialization process with prior childhood activities. Similarly, if one sees the play activities of children as a mirror of the real adult world and its values, concepts, tendencies, and ways of thought, then incorrect classification of a society's games may result in a wholly reversed or otherwise inappropriate or false picture of that world. (1971, p. 178)

In this way, Goldstein warns that all researchers of children's play and games should heed, that is, beware of classification schemes as grand conclusions cannot and should not be drawn from them.

I can summarize my limitations by stating that when using ethnographic methods to study children's self-organized play one must be aware of the difficulties in obtaining large amounts of data; the individuality of each play group (and resist the temptation to generalize about these groups); and caution which must be used when analyzing children's self-directed games.

Implications of the Research Findings

Most of the implications of my research findings are related to the use and evaluation of children's play within the school system. Play is being used across the board in lower elementary grades and therefore all aspects of children's play must be recognized and understood, even play outside the school. In this section, all four of my findings will be discussed with regard to their implications for education.

The outdoor play of children has significant implications for the education of children. The findings which I have noted in the outdoor play of the children at Sunshine Park and Playground, namely multi-age, cross-gender, cooperative, and rich and diverse play, need to be taken seriously. A lot of push, in education in the last few years, has been to provide equal opportunities for all children. If one way children are able to transcend some of the social barriers is through outdoor play, then educators and administrators need to take this form of play seriously. This is borne out by what other researchers have said, where Hartup (in Farver & Howes, 1988)

> has documented that play group composition significantly affects children's social behavior. He hypothesized a symmetric-asymmetric nature to same and mixed-age social interaction. According to this model, symmetrical behaviors such as sociability and aggression occur most in the

> interaction of age-mates, whereas asymmetrical behaviors such as nurturance, instruction, and leadership are characteristic of mixed-age interaction. (p. 206)

The characteristics which seem to unfold in outdoor, multi-aged play (namely cooperation, instruction, and leadership) are the same as those qualities which we stress and wish to promote in the elementary classroom. For this reason we need to see outdoor play is an option for children in school.

Henniger, in his research, stresses the importance of the outdoor setting, for the understanding and promotion of children's play.

> The outdoor environment has received far less attention from researchers and practitioners interested in children's play. . . . It seems quite possible that given the right equipment and careful teacher planning and encouragement, any desired play type could be stimulated in the outdoor environment. This setting has definite advantages over the indoor environment for certain types of play and for certain children. (1980, p. 114)

In addition, Henniger (1980) notes that, in his study, he found outdoor play to be exceptionally good for physical development, social play (especially cooperative play), and dramatic play. As mentioned in Chapter Three of this thesis, Tizard et al. (1976) in their research on working-class children's play agree with Henniger's findings. They found that working-class children were more comfortable and showed greater maturity playing in outdoor settings. They also found that "co-operative group play between children is more likely to develop outdoors" (1976, p. 273). In addition to similar kinds of play found in outdoor settings, Tizard et al. (1976) concur with my suggestions that staff need to be encouraged in devising means for the use of outdoor environments and activities to help children learn.

The importance of cooperative behaviors is frequently stressed in social settings, such as the school. If cooperation is promoted and maintained through self-organized play sessions in outdoor environments, then once again this setting needs to be more highly utilized. The way the

> competitive element is handled in childhood play is a big factor in predisposing children in particular societies to take the competitive stance that they do as adults. There is no question that the games of childhood reflect some of the ideals that exist in the adult society and that play is a kind of socialization in preparation for taking your place in that adult society. (Bruner, 1983, p. 62)

Thus, if we are serious about promoting cooperative behavior among children then we need to give more thought to outdoor settings where children are able to play in multi-aged groups.

Although there is a need to promote this outdoor play and its many advantages, we must still be cautious about controlling it, as this could change its form. "The fact has to be faced that modern civilization interferes with a hard and heavy hand in the spontaneous play of children" (Allen, 1968, p. 11). In fact, this control of play is typical of Western cultures[62].

> In most non-Western cultures the opportunities for children to engage in self-organized play are greater because they are frequently considered to be competent at an earlier age than Western children and therefore there are fewer watchful eyes on their behavior. Along with this, play is often defined as a behavior that does not need to be watched and strictly supervised, organized, or promoted by adults. Play is generally seen as

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[62]In fact, Western culture has a preoccupation with "fixing and improving children by manipulating the external environment, by providing the 'right' materials and the 'right' models for behavior" (Schwartzman, 1984, p. 25).

> natural, and while it may be actively discouraged in some societies, it is tolerated or ignored. (Schwartzman, 1984, p. 15)

In addition, to the cooperative nature and multi-age organization of self-directed outdoor play, cross-gender play is another facet of the play which I observed at Sunshine Park and Playground. As a society we are attempting to overcome gender discrimination, the cultivation and advancement of outdoor, self-directed play could be very beneficial, especially in our schools.

Finally, the ability of *all* children to play in rich and diverse ways in the self-organized outdoor environment can be seen to be another positive implication for education. If all children including those who do not normally show a variety of play behaviors, can do so in self-directed, outdoor setting, then once again, this needs to be fostered.

The findings of my research on children's self-organized outdoor play, supported by other studies, obviously have substantial implications for education and further studies in children's play. Probably most important of these is the necessity for schools to recognize and promote self-organized outdoor play.

New/Other Literature

There are two areas from other research which need to be mentioned in this final discussion on children's self-organized outdoor play. The first of these works is one carried out by Doyle, in which he examined play settings which have few or many locations in which to play. He refers to these as single- and multi-niche settings. In his work, he found that "multi-niche settings/activities produced more prosocial behavior between children. Prosocial behavior is defined by: affection, altruism, comforting, cooperation, defending, friendliness, helping, pleasure giving, sharing, and valuing" (1975, p. 202). This, I believe, is an important consideration for any play environment. There appears to be a fairly clear connection between multi-niche settings and self-organized outdoor play. If a playground is rather large (relative to the number of children it is used by) and well-equipped, then it would be likely considered to promote multi-niche activities. This interpretation corresponds with the cooperative, friendly, affectionate play which I observed at Sunshine Park and Playground.

The second of these areas which needs to be brought to light is the coherence which my research has with primate studies on peer play. This is particularly important because the juvenile maturation period in humans is unusually long, compared to other primates. "During these years of maturation, juveniles spend their time in the literally 'serious business' of play. (The) prolongation of the juvenile period creates those conditions in which learning from peers and near-peers becomes a major vehicle of socialization" (Herzog, 1984, p. 73). This peer play is said, by primatologists and those who are interested in primate play, to be vitally important for learning.

> Developmentally, childhood in all primates is characterized by peer play. What most educational researchers have failed to notice is that for these youthful primates, peer play is the appropriate method of learning, and

> perhaps the only efficient major method of learning for them at this stage of mental development. (Dobbert & Cooke, 1987, p. 16)

Because self-organized, outdoor play encourages and promotes this naturally-structured peer play then this type of child-play needs to be utilized.

Future Directions

Suggestions for future directions for the study of children's play[63] will be derived both from the findings presented in this study, and from other literature which has been discussed in this thesis. The future directions for the study of children's play will be discussed with regard to three areas: the setting, the focus of study, and the control of play.

The Setting

As noted through out this thesis, the study of children's play has rarely taken place outside of some affiliation with an educational institution or laboratory. We must keep in mind that the "behavior and learning in experimental contexts -- children interacting with *strangers* in *strange* situations -- may be quite different from learning in natural settings" (Corsaro & Tomlinson, 1980, p. 105). The future directions of the study of children's play therefore needs to reflect this and continue to work towards researching in alternate settings[64]. As a result, of this goal to carry out more observations of children

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[63]Norbeck (1977) makes an important comment on the entire study of play wherein its study has been very slow, and perhaps "we did not study play because it was somehow beneath our attention. . . . I wonder if play is even now wholly respectable, if it is generally regarded as a subject of study that is truly worthwhile. Unless students of play concern themselves with play therapy or other aspects of play that appear to have immediate, practical value, I think they are still generally faced with the need to justify their interests" (p. 14).

[64]In addition, McDermott & Hood (1982) point out that as educational researchers (and ethnographers) we must be careful not to *"continue to allow educational educational psychology to define research problems, to set limits on what can be studied competently by ethnographers, (or) even to dictate some key theoretical concepts"* (p. 232).

outside laboratory settings we will be able to increase the number of contexts to which we can legitimately generalize (Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition, 1975). With more information across a wider setting, we will have a much better understanding of children's play.

The Focus of Study

The focus of the study of children's play has usually arisen from the view point and interests of the Western researcher. As previously discussed, this focus needs to be redirected. We need to recognize that children have a culture of their own, and we therefore must avoid doing research which is focused by adult concerns. Hughes points out the need to consider the social/political strength which children have in their play groups. She discusses how "children are political actors very early, but this dimension, as well as the social competence that underlies it, has been almost entirely neglected in analyses of children's play" (1991, p. 296). Additionally, Hughes (1990) emphasizes that we must concentrate on the dynamics of peer interaction, and that we must recognize children as "*actors actively engaged* in the constructions of their social worlds rather than as *passive objects* who are the recipients of culture" (p. 283). Although, the 'culture of children' may be a difficult one for adults to enter as researchers, we must still try and obtain very vital information about this culture, and at the very least to acknowledge that this culture is important.

In addition, to the Western adult's focus on children's play, we need to avoid the frequent comparison of play. This refers to the comparison of gender, culture, ethnicity, or any other feature which brings forth distinctions between children or groups of children. When this is done we tend to ignore the features of social interaction which the children share in common. And if the ethnographer only focuses on "what distinguishes a group from those around it

(then this) inevitably distorts the analysis and leads to (the) study of only a small subset of the cultural resources available to that group" (Hughes, 1990, p. 285). With a more holistic approach to the study of play, researchers may be able to overcome this problem.

Control of Play

The control of children's play has been an issue thoroughly discussed in this thesis, and this is a dilemma which needs to be explored more extensively in future research. "Most educational research focuses on aspects of schooling that adults hope to improve. To improve a situation, one must manipulate it. Researchers interested in children's play are torn between a desire to influence play and the realization that children's play should remain their own domain" (Finnan, 1982, p. 375). But once the play has been manipulated by adults then, as Opie & Opie (1969) have noted, the self-organized play of the children changes. It seems to be that once the children lose control of their play, they no longer want to indulge in that play anymore.

Orlick in his evaluation of children's games notes that the control of children's games has become excessive, and they have actually become industrialized, like many other aspects of Western society. "The emphasis on production, machine orientation, and over specialization has become as widespread in games as in industry. Games themselves have become rigid, judgmental, highly organized, and excessively goal-oriented" (Orlick, 1978, p. 5). Orlick (1978), like many others, suggests that once this has happened the 'plain old fun' has been lost from the children's play and games.

Suggestions have been made by a few scholars of play on ways to deal with this issue of adult control of children's play, and these need to be considered and more completely explored in further research. Mergen (1980) and Sutton-

Smith (1982) both suggest that one way to deal with this loss of control that children have experienced in their play, is to include the children in the planning process of play and playgrounds. "Bringing children into the playground planning process may help to restore the playground environment to its former prominence, but history cautions that the see-saw of adult expectations and children's behavior may be the most important piece of playground hardware of all" (Mergen, 1980, p. 204).

In addition, to involving the children in the planning of their play spaces, or perhaps before such planning we need to acknowledge that the children must *have* these private places. Opie & Opie (1969) point out that "something is lacking in our understanding of the child community . . . and that in our continual search for efficient units of administration we have over-looked that the most precious gift we can give the young is social space: The necessary space -- or privacy -- in which to become human beings" (p. 14). But in spite of the need which children have for their *own* play space, we must not forget that they do not want to be completely separated from the adult world (Opie & Opie, 1969; Bruner, 1983).

Further research in the area of children's self-organized play needs to be carried out. As noted the domains of setting, focus of study, and control of play are in serious need of further study.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on a general discussion of many aspects of this study of children's self-organized play, and has also reviewed the particularly pertinent points which have been brought out of the main body of the thesis. The importance of studying play and advantage of using ethnographic methods to study play have been reviewed. The limitations and implications of this study of children's self-directed play have also been highlighted. This chapter has concluded with a brief discussion on what new/other literature has had to say on the topic, as well as what the future directions of the study of children's self-organized play might take.

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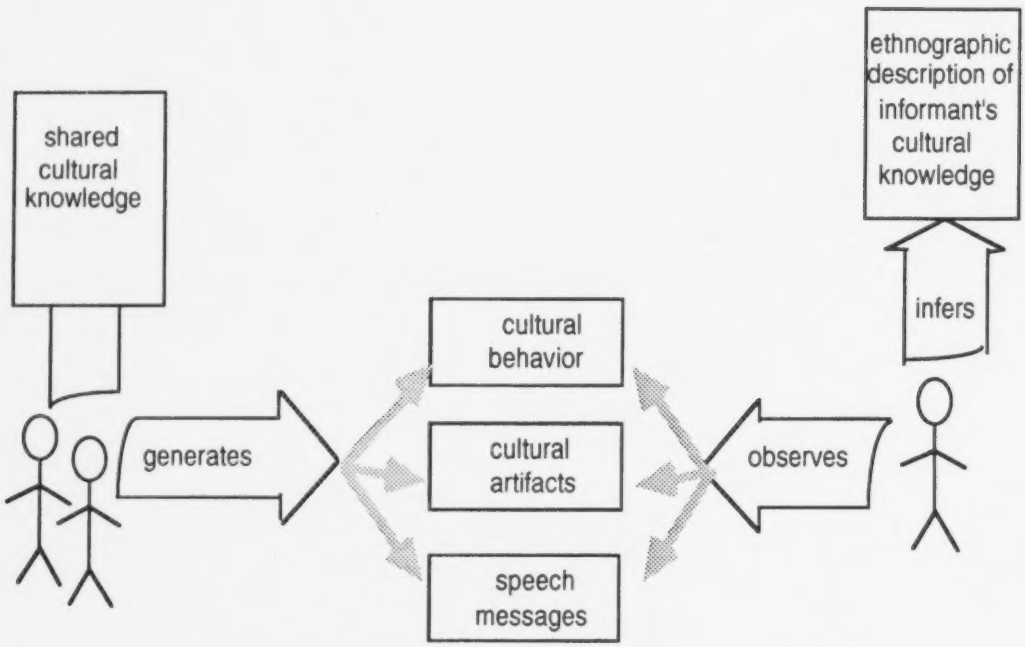
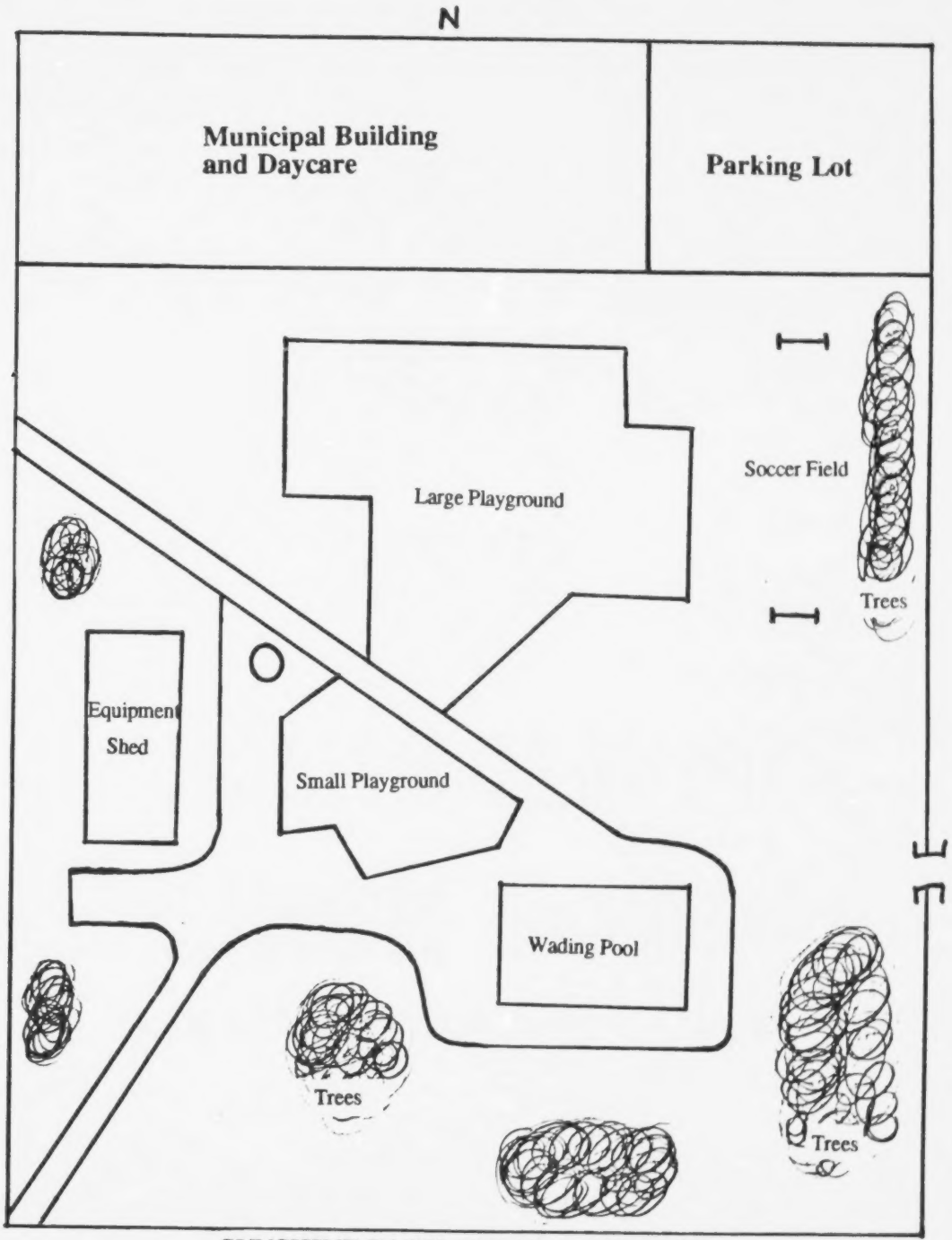
APPENDIX I



"Making Cultural Inferences"

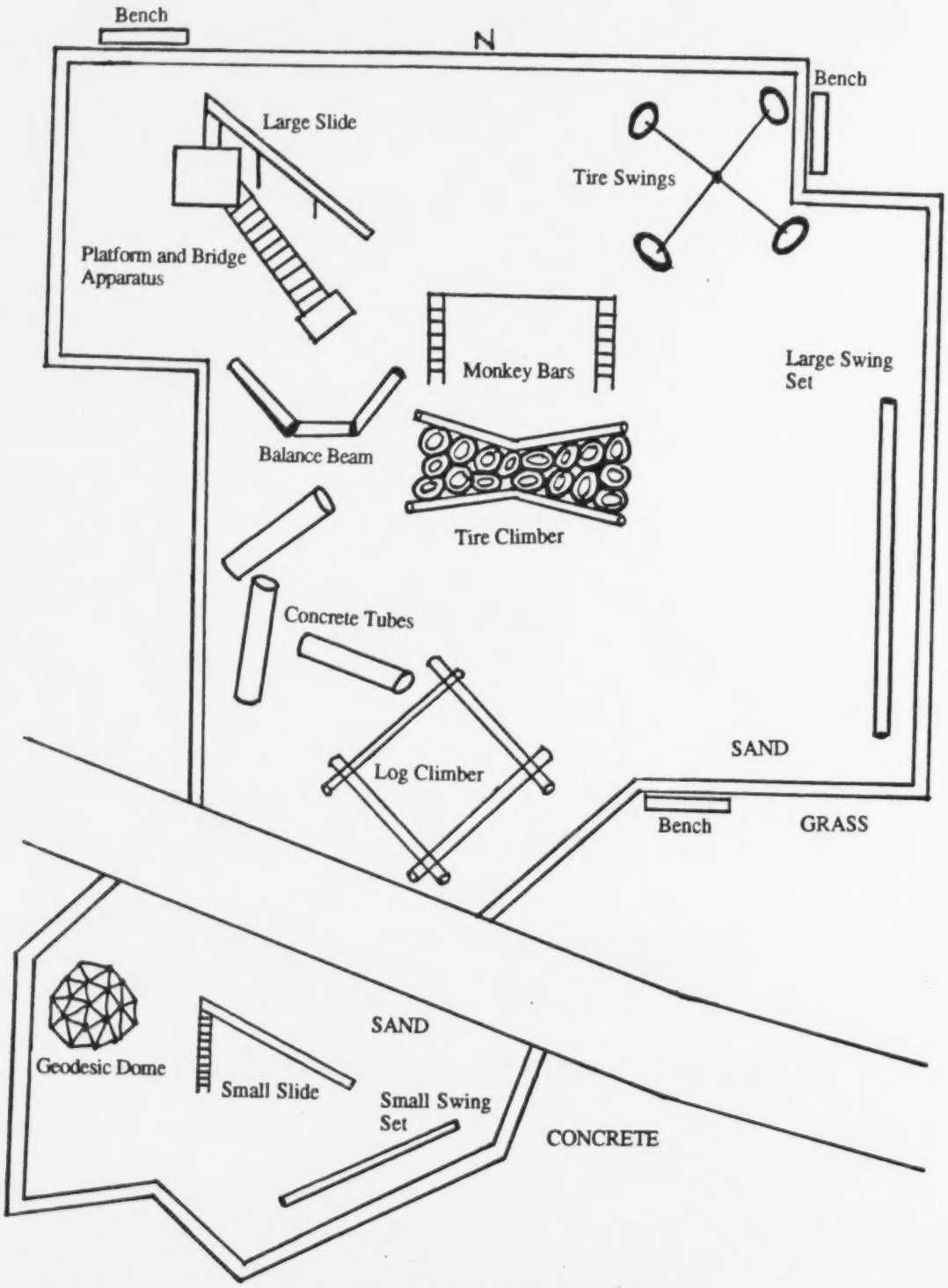
From: James P. Spradley, Participant Observation (1980, p. 11).

APPENDIX II



SUNSHINE PARK AND PLAYGROUND

MAP A



SUNSHINE PLAYGROUND

MAP B

APPENDIX III

Sunshine Park and Playground Photographs

Photo # 1 -- Small Playground/ Equipment Shed

Photo #2 -- Municipal Building/ Bocce Ball Players

Photo # 3 - Treed Area

Photo # 4 - Soccer Field/ Wading Pool/ Trees

Photo # 5 - Community Playground

Photo # 6 - Concrete Sidewalk

Photo # 7 - Wooden Edging

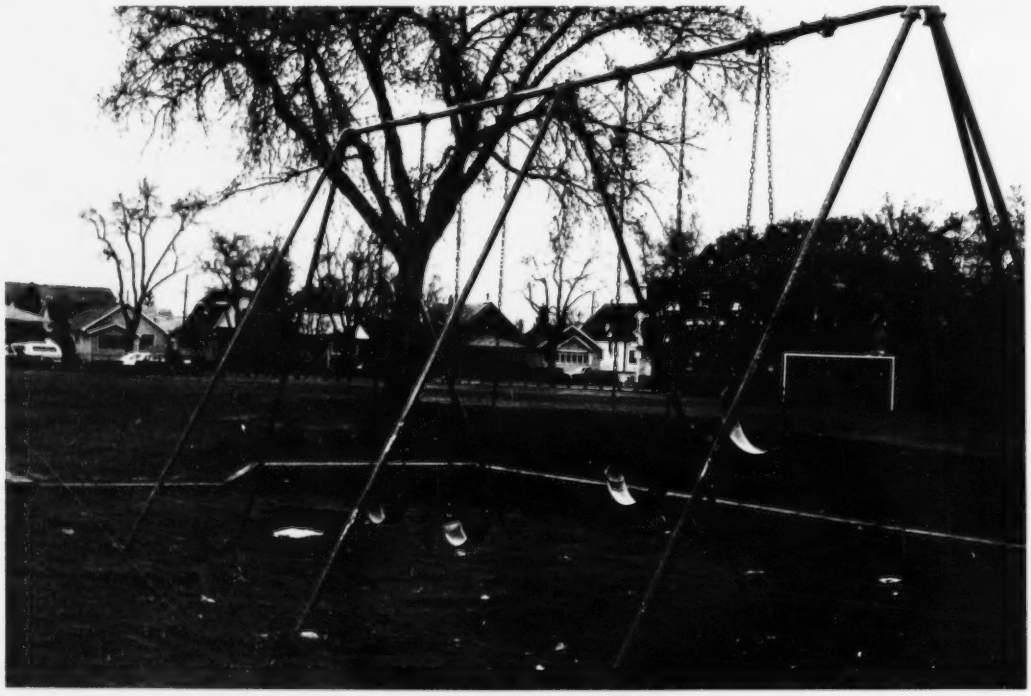


Photo # 8 - Large Swing Set/ Chains on Top Bar

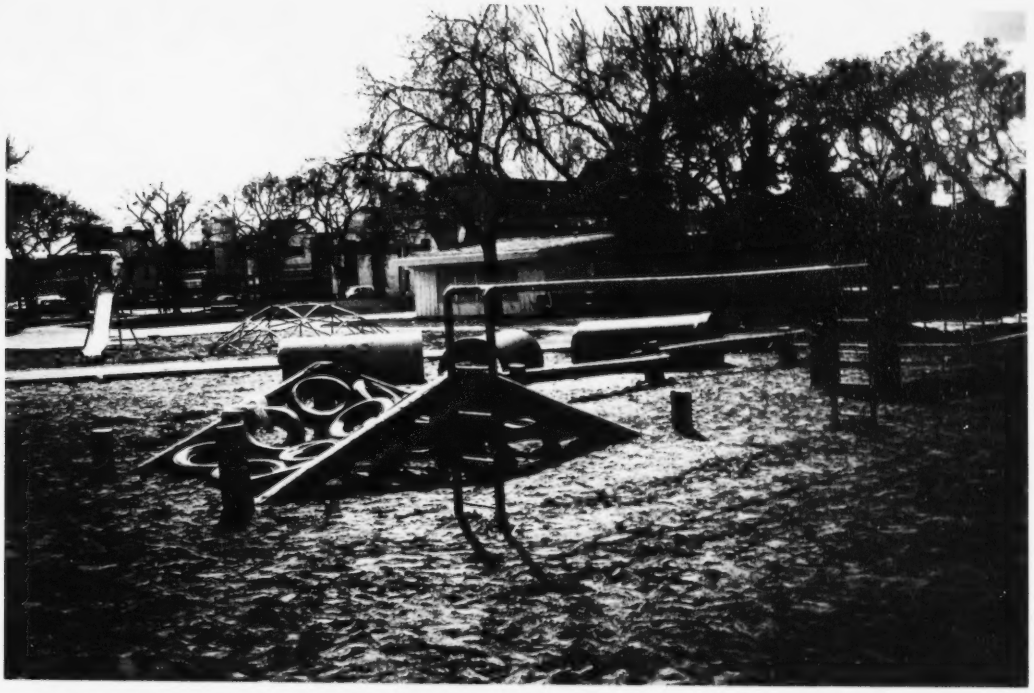


Photo # 9 - Monkey Bars/ Tire Climber/ Balance Beam/ Concrete Tubes

Photo # 10 - Large Slide/ Platform and 'Bridge'

Photo # 11 - Tire Swings

Photo # 12 - Log Climber/ Platform and 'Bridge'

Photo #13 - End Posts

Photo # 14 - Boy Flying Through the Air

APPENDIX IV

The play activities at Sunshine Park and Playground will briefly be expanded upon in this appendix in order to provide a greater clarification.

The activities at Sunshine Park and Playground were vast and varied. These included play activities which were *directly* attached to the playground and its equipment as well as activities which had little or nothing to do with the playground itself, except that it provided the space. I have divided the activities into two main areas, 1) those which are carried out on the playground equipment, and 2) those which did not require the playground equipment.

1) Activities using the equipment

-- swinging on the tire swings -- this could be either an individual activity or done in a small group of two or three. Although swinging was the usual activity on these swings, positions on the swings varied. For example, the children sat inside the swings, but if the children were older then I also saw them standing on the top of the tires and swinging that way.

-- playing on the monkey bars -- this could be either an individual or small group activity. When the children played on this apparatus, they usually crawled and hung on the bars.

-- playing on the 'bridge' -- the usual play on this apparatus occurred individually or in pairs, and although running across the 'bridge' was fun, the children appeared to have the most fun by standing on the 'bridge' and making as much noise as they could.

-- playing on the large slide -- this was a very popular piece of equipment and appeared to be used most often for small group activities. The children used the slide for sliding, but also for other activities such as a ramp for

Dinky toys which they had brought from home (by either sliding the toys down or pushing the toys up the slide).

-- swinging on the large swing set -- besides playing 'swing tag' on these swings, the children also used these swings to swing. Although they enjoyed swinging on their own they also enjoyed being pushed by others including me. This activity was usually done in small groups.

-- playing in the wading pool -- I only saw the children playing (in a small group) in this area once, but what they were doing was playing in the mucky water which had accumulated after the winter snows had melted. The children played in the water by splashing each other and by wading through the water.

-- using concrete edging as a balance beam -- although this was not part of the playground equipment, I saw the children playing on this edging a few different times. This was usually an individual activity.

2) Activities which do not use the playground equipment

-- riding bikes around -- this was done as either a small group activity or individually. Although this activity used the *space* at the playground, the activity could have taken place anywhere where there was room.

-- walking around the playground -- this appeared to take place in order to check out who was at the playground. In addition, the children would sometimes just wander around with a friend or two while at the playground.

-- children who bring their own toys to the playground -- these children simply used the space at the playground to play. This activity appeared to occur in families.

-- playing in the sand -- although this activity required the use of the sand, it could be done anywhere where the children had a spot to do digging. When the children played in the sand, which was a very popular activity, they would: dig tunnels for their toy cars, dig to see how far they could dig, dig and they bury things in the sand, and dig holes to bury parts of themselves in the sand.